

curses even when faced with lethal ones? - Join Harry and his new friends - some old and some new - as they find out.

Disclaimer: I own nothing of the HP world JK Rowling does.

Chapter 1 – Wish You Were Here

It was an ordinary evening in Little Whinging. The birds were singing and couples were taking strolls along the walks after tea. The best way to describe this particular place was very ordinary. Plain identical non-descript homes lined the straight streets of this meticulously over-planned subdivision.

A rather ordinary-looking car which looked just about like every other car in the vicinity turned on to Privet Drive and onto the driveway of a house whose paint, finish and landscaping screamed the message “We go out of our way to be as average as possible”. Three of the four occupants waddled out of the car and into the house.

The fourth occupant - a teenager - had not yet moved. His emerald eyes were lifeless as they stared out at nothing in particular. He sat there for 15 minutes before the largest of the house’s occupants yelled for him to get in the house.

The boy shook his head and looked around as if he hadn’t a clue where he was. When the reality of the situation hit him, his shoulders slumped further than they already had and he dragged himself from the car. He went to the back of the car and pulled a trunk and a cage from the boot. Dragging them to the front door, he paused and looked out at the street and sighed - Harry Potter had returned for his annual imprisonment.

Harry went into the house and – ignoring his uncle’s ranting – Harry dragged his possessions up the stairs to the smallest bedroom in the house. Once he entered the room, the door slammed behind him and he could hear the click of the locks as they were engaged. For once he did not mind nor really paid any attention to his situation. His mind was where it had been fixated for the past few weeks - the Department of Mysteries and the loss of his godfather Sirius Black.

Harry had been blaming himself for the death of his godfather and the fact that he had lead 5 of his friends into an ambush. A conversation on the train back to London broke him out of this self-loathing and made him see the situation more clearly.

/Flashback/

Harry was sitting alone in a compartment near the back of the train. He had bee sullen and withdrawn and had pretty much asked everyone to leave him alone. Ron and Ginny hadn't even talked to him since that night and got on the train with Dean and Seamus.

About and hour into the trip the door opened and Hermione, Neville and Luna came in. Harry tried to protest, but he stopped short of saying anything when he saw the look in his best friend's eyes. Hermione had received the worst injuries and yet here she had a look of heartfelt concern that he couldn't avoid.

"Hi Harry. We need to talk. You've been distant for the past few weeks and we're worried about you," Hermione said as she sat down beside him.

"Why are you worried about me? I thought you would all hate me after I led you into that ambush and almost got all of us killed and ended up killing S..." Harry sputtered and could not finish his sentence. He felt the tears welling up again and he was determined not to break down anymore.

Before Hermione could respond, Neville piped up, "Hate you? Harry, you're one of my closest friends. You're one of the few people who have never made fun of me. You stood up for me in first year during our first flying class. This past year you had the patience to teach me and show me that I can be just as good as anyone else. As for the Ministry, you gave me the opportunity to fight back against the people who took my parents away from me. I am proud to have fought beside you and I can't thank you enough for giving me the courage and the skills to do so."

"But we could have been killed Neville! You broke your dad's wand! What is your grandmother going to say?"

"She came to Hogwarts and talked to me the day after the incident. I was scared when I first heard she was on her way, but when she got there, I walked right up to her and said I had no regrets about what happened and I would do it all over again given the chance. Do you know what she said to me?"

Harry looked at Neville dreading what was coming and asked "What?"

"She said that she had never been as proud of me as she was the moment she was told by the Ministry Aurors that her grandson had stood with four other students and Harry Potter and fought a dozen of you-know-who's inner circle and held out until help arrived. She told me I'm truly my parents' son and worthy of the Longbottom name. She's even taking me straight to Diagon Alley from King's Cross to get me my own wand."

Harry was speechless; this was not what he had expected to hear. Neville continued, "Harry, I know that you don't go looking for trouble and that it always seems to find you. I want you to know that I will continue to stand by you. You have helped me discover who I really am, and I will be by your side as we fight this evil. I never felt as alive and confident as I did that night and I have you to thank for it. I finally feel that I can live in a way that would make my parents proud."

Harry was stunned. This was a different Neville than he had ever seen before. "Thanks Nev, I appreciate it."

He looked down and Hermione had grasped his hand while Neville was talking. He could feel the warmth, and when he looked at her, he saw something in her eyes - he wasn't sure what it was - that made him feel more secure. "What about you 'Mione, I was scared you might not want to be my friend anymore after what happened."

"Harry, how could you think that", Hermione said rolling her eyes, "You have to understand that as long as you are who you are, I will be your loyal friend and stand with you. You can't get rid of me."

“But what are your parents going to say?”

“My parents raised me to stand up and fight for what is right. They were very concerned about me getting hurt, but I explained the stakes involved here and what could happen. After about an hour they began to understand why I was doing this. They still don’t like it, but they understand.” Hermione had straightened up and spoke very proudly with a gleam in her eyes as she spoke to Harry.

He smirked, “So you wore them down like you do to me.”

“Exactly!”

Luna, who normally had a dreamy, far away look in her eyes was looking very intently at the other three during the course of this conversation. She suddenly looked directly into Harry’s eyes and started to speak to him in a very direct manner.

“Harry I want to thank you as well. You have been the first person at Hogwarts to look past my ‘Loony’ persona and not judge me for who I appear be. You respect the person I am. You were my first real friend at school and through your acceptance of me I can now count Hermione and Neville as my friends as well. You trained me to defend myself in a time when the Ministry’s actions would end up with us being nothing more than some Death Eaters’ practice target. Harry, you have my allegiance as well. I will be there to fight with you in this conflict. But on to more important things - Harry you are not responsible for the death of Sirius Black.”

Harry tried to interrupt but Luna continued, “Please don’t interrupt me, from what you’ve told us, you’ve been receiving visions all year, some of them actual ones. You’ve also had to put up with the Ministry trying to kill you. So when you got a vision that your godfather, one of the last remaining ties to your parents, was in trouble, there was no way you were not going to go.”

“Harry, your godfather came to the Ministry along with those other people because of his love for you.”

Harry said quietly, "That's why it's my fault."

Hermione picked up where Luna left off, "Harry I talked to Tonks and Lupin about what happened. Remus said that he could feel the pride and love rolling off of Sirius when they entered and saw you and Neville still fighting. Both Tonks and Remus agreed that Sirius would not have wanted it any other way."

"Harry, they both told me that Sirius loved you more than anyone else in the world. He thought of you as his own son. His entire stay in Azkaban was spent blaming himself for not preventing your parent's deaths and protecting you. That night at the Ministry allowed him to make up for those debts that he felt he owed to the Potter family. It's a terrible tragedy that he had to die, but at least it happened in a way he would have wanted it. The last thing he would want is for you to be miserable and blame yourself."

"You guys are right, I didn't kill him - Bellatrix LeStrange did." Harry sighed, "I'll still miss him though."

"Harry that is part of the grieving process. It's perfectly normal. Try to concentrate on the time you had together. Think about the Marauders and their legacy." She smiled, "He and your father are probably pranking your mother right now."

Harry suddenly laughed at that image. "Thanks guys, this really makes me feel better and I'm honoured to call you my friends. By the way, what's the story with Ron and Gin? I haven't spoken to them since that night."

Hermione's face dropped, "They haven't spoken to me in fact, I think they are avoiding me. I saw them speaking with Dumbledore a couple of times, but every time I approached them they walked away."

Luna concurred, "They haven't spoken to me either."

With a perplexed look on his face, Neville said, "They came to me once last week. It was a strange conversation. They said something about avoiding people like Harry in future and Dumbledore said people like us had to stick together".

"What the hell does that mean?" Harry asked.

Neville looked right at Harry and told him, "Beat's me. However, I told Ron and Ginny that I was disgusted with their actions and that you are my friend and I will not turn my back on you."

"Thanks for standing up for me Neville. You know, Ron was my first friend but he always seemed jealous and resentful. Hopefully this is just a passing thing."

"Harry?" he turned to look at the girl next to him, "Can I get Hedwig's help for a couple of days? There's some letters I need to send and she would make things much easier."

"It's alright with me Hermione, but I'll have to ask Hedwig." He looked up to his familiar in her cage, "What do you think Hedwig? Can you help Hermione for a couple of days?"

Hedwig looked at him and nodded with a single "Hoot".

/End Flashback/

Harry lay back in his bed and thought about the trip. The four of them talked for the entire trip and he realized how lucky he was to have such good friends.

Hermione didn't leave his side for the entire trip. Harry thought about his best friend - she was loyal to him without hesitation and yet always kept him in line. And her smile...

"Where did that come from?" he thought. "I must be tired."

He decided to unpack a bit before he went to bed. He opened his trunk and found the books he wanted to read this summer and put them on his shelf. He also got a bag of owl treats and put them in his night table.

His invisibility cloak, wand, and a few other special items were always hidden in the secret place under the floorboards. "Better keep my

wand close,” he muttered and removed the wand from the rest and put it under his pillow.

He pulled up the floorboard and noticed there was something else in there. It was a large envelope. It had a message written on it:

Dear Prongslet,

If I don't make it back from the Ministry, please open this and read its contents as soon as you possibly can.

Love,

Sirius

Chapter 2 – Seriously Sirius

Harry sat stunned. He read and reread the front of the envelope several times while his brain was trying to process the situation.

“How...? Why...? When...?” Multiple questions sprung to mind but never fully formed. A single tear ran down Harry’s face as the emotions he had thought he was over threatened to come back to the surface. He closed his eyes and took some deep cleansing breaths like Hermione had shown him once.

“Surely this can’t be real,” he thought as he opened his eyes. The envelope was still in his hands with his Godfather’s writing on it. Harry turned it over and slowly, carefully broke the seal and opened it.

Inside was a sheaf of paper and a smaller envelope. He unfolded it and started reading:

Harry,

Time is short. I just found out that you (and knowing them - your friends) are in danger and have been lured into the DoM. Dumbledore doesn’t want me to come, but I’m not going to be controlled by that old coot any longer.

If you are reading this I’ve either forgotten to pick it up but most likely I didn’t make it out of the Ministry alive. Don’t mourn for me pup, I knew something like this was inevitable given what I know. My time and luck were running out and people were beginning to suspect what I knew. I just hope that I went down fighting at your side.

You mean the world to me Harry. I hope you don’t take offence, but I love you as my own son.

Harry had to stop here and compose himself. Sirius loved him. For the first time in his life he could remember a parental figure told him he was loved. So many questions raced through his mind. Eager to find out what information people would kill Sirius for, he kept reading the letter.

Harry, the information contained on these pages will change your whole view of the wizarding world and make you question almost everything you've been told up to now. Hopefully by the time you've read through this and followed the instructions on the last page, you will have at least some people around you who you know you can trust.

The following pages detail information and evidence of a conspiracy. Your mother Lily and I started finding clues about it when we worked for the DoM. Unfortunately, we slipped up and that set off a chain of events that got Lily killed and me thrown into Azkaban without a trial. I managed to put this and other evidence away safely out of harm's reach when I found out about your parents.

I hate to tell you this, but if the wrong people find the information you are holding, your life will be in danger. I was going to share this information with you over the summer and had planned for us to disappear. You see Harry; you are one of the keys to cracking this conspiracy.

I want you to read the papers now and, when you are ready, follow the instructions on the last page.

Sirius

Harry put the letter down and started reading the stack of pages Sirius left him. As he read through, the information he was absorbing turned his whole world upside down. Once he finished all but the last page, he took off his glasses, rubbed his temples and shook his head.

He started speaking to himself, "Well, if I thought my life couldn't get any worse after Dumbledore told me the prophecy about me and Voldemort, I was wrong. Now I know I have to fight a dark lord, to fulfill an ancient prophecy. I also find out that there are four of us who have to get together to defeat him but lord almighty, why did one of them have to be Him? How am I going to get him to cooperate? I mean, right now we aren't on the best of speaking terms."

He shook his head and chuckled, "well, I'll cross that bridge when I come to it."

He read the last page.

Well Pup,

I'm sorry to have dropped this on you so suddenly, but then as you well know, life has a tendency to be unfair. Take this advice from an old Marauder; don't let the weight of this get you down. Make sure you keep good things in your life as well. Make the fight worth fighting! In short, get your head out of your ass and tell Hermione how you feel and for Merlin's sake snog!

Harry was stunned. Did he feel that way about her? Then it hit him like a well-aimed bludger – the look in her eyes, the contact on the train – did she feel something more towards him?

I wasn't the first time that night his brain shut down.

When he started to recover, he realized that he had cared about Hermione since the troll incident in first year. Second year he spent all his free time at her bedside as he tried to figure out the puzzle. He didn't go down to the Chamber for Ginny; he went down there for Hermione. She had always stood by him and never let him down. If he was honest with himself, he did feel something for her. He made up his mind to talk to her about this as soon as he could.

That being sorted for now, he went back to the letter.

Recovered yet? Moony and I always thought it would take a bludger to the head to get you to see what everyone around you two does.

Now, read this carefully. This final page is a portkey that will take you directly to Gringotts. I know the old man won't let you out of your prison, so don't let anyone see you leave. Don't worry about the "wards" around the house; the portkey will take you through them.

Once you are at Gringotts, ask for Director Ragnok. Give him the small envelope.

Harry, don't leave those papers lying around. I've charmed them so only you and those you allow can read them. It's similar to a fidelius charm. You have to give someone explicit permission to read it. Anyone else will think it's an erotic story with him or her as the main character.

Harry smiled at the true Marauder spirit.

Now to activate the portkey, you just have to use the same method as activating the map. At Gringotts there is more evidence for you to see, plus I have a few surprises for you.

Take care Pup – I don't want to be seeing you for a very long time.

Padfoot

Harry put down the letter and tucked everything back into the big envelope and put it back under the floorboards.

As he settled into bed he thought, "Tomorrow's going to be a busy day."

Chapter 3 – Interest from the Bank

The next morning Harry got up early and finished unpacking. He was preoccupied by the information he gathered from Sirius' letter and the information contained in the documents. His brain was starting to come to terms with the enormity and complexity of the task before him. Luckily he wouldn't have to go through it alone.

The most surprising part was that Sirius and his parents had found out the prophecy and even managed to get it all. Dumbledore had gone out of his way to hide it so that very few people even knew about it and that no one but he knew it all. Sirius and his mom really had been good at finding information.

Harry was so deep in thought that he almost missed the sound of the locks opening on his door signaling that he could use the shower and get ready for the day. With any luck he'd be able to get some breakfast.

After having a shower, and getting dressed in his least-ragged muggle clothing, Harry made his way downstairs. There was a note from Vernon saying that they had gone away for four weeks and that if anything was missing or out of place when they got back there would be hell to pay.

Harry smiled a genuine smile. He set about making himself a big breakfast. As he sat down to eat, he reflected that this was probably the most enjoyable meal and the best company he had ever enjoyed in this house.

After breakfast he cleaned up and went back upstairs to prepare to go to Gringotts. As he got to his room the large red bird perched on his bed startled him. He maintained an outward appearance of joy for he was truly happy to see the phoenix itself. The only problem was the letter Fawkes was delivering.

"Well, let's see where I've been sentenced to this year – Day Parole, Incarceration with Daily Exercise, or 'The Box'" he thought grimly as he retrieved and opened the letter.

Harry,

You must not leave the Dursley's house or even be seen in the streets this summer. Voldemort is more dangerous than ever after the Ministry and I have received word that his Death Eaters have orders to stun and kidnap you on sight. Your best protections are the blood wards surrounding your aunt and uncle's home. The Order will be posting guard for your safety and they have also been told to keep you in the house as well.

As unfortunate as this may be, we will also be monitoring any owls heading for the house and monitoring all incoming correspondence for dark spells. I assure you we are doing this for your continued safety and the greater good.

There's one other thing. The reading of Sirius Black's will is scheduled for two weeks from today on July fourteenth. Due to the security risks we cannot allow you to attend. However there is a way that I can represent your interests. Please attach a note allowing me authorizing me to represent you on that date. You will not be missing very much. Sirius had little to his name and most of it will probably go to the rest of the Black family.

I have asked Fawkes to await your response. If you need to get in touch with anyone during the summer, you can summon Fawkes and he will be able to bring a message to me.

Albus Dumbledore

Harry was furious inside. It was definitely solitary confinement "And the bastard didn't even give me a glove and a ball" he muttered under his breath.

He pulled out a piece of parchment and thought very carefully about what he was going to write. He was going to tell the truth, but in such a way that he would give the Headmaster exactly what he asked for. A small smile crept on his face. Sirius had foreseen this and now Harry knew one thing he would be doing at the bank.

Headmaster,

I appreciate your concern for my safety. Thank you for caring so much for my safety. After what I learned in your office that night I understand why Voldemort and his people are after me. I can assure you that I will not even think about walking out the door of this house until it is safe to do so.

As for the will, please accept this note as my authorization to represent me at the July fourteenth will reading of Sirius Black and act in my interests for anything I may receive on that day.

Harry Potter

Harry rolled up his response and handed it to Fawkes. The phoenix left in a ball of flame.

Harry nearly doubled over laughing. Sure Dumbledore got what he asked for in a way. Harry didn't mention about leaving by portkey. And if he was right about Sirius, there would be a will reading before the fourteenth.

There was no time to waste.

Harry got the documents from the spot under the floorboards and grabbed his wand. He took the portkey page, pointed his wand at it and said, "I solemnly swear I am up to no good." He immediately felt the pull behind his navel and disappeared from Privet drive.

Scene Break

Harry ended up in the room in the same way as every other time he traveled by portkey – flat on his face. When he straightened up his glasses and looked around, he was in an office and not the lobby of Gringotts as he expected. What had Sirius got him into now?

"Ahem." Harry looked around for the origin of the cough. He got up and looked around. On the other side of a large desk sat a familiar-looking goblin.

"Oh, Hello Mr. Griphook. It's been a few years. How are you?"

“Very well Mr. Potter. I’m surprised you remember me. Most wizards don’t distinguish one goblin from another.”

“Well, I’m not like most wizards. And please just call me Harry. If I may ask, where am I?”

“You are in my office at Gringotts. Your godfather made special arrangements so that you didn’t end up in the main lobby. I’m sure you can appreciate that. Normal portkeys can only take you to the lobby. Only Goblin portkeys can go anywhere else at Gringotts. Well then, time as they say is money. If you will follow me I will take you to Director Ragnok.”

Griphook got up and headed for the door. Harry followed him down a number of hallways until they arrived at a large set of doors. Griphook motioned Harry to enter. As Harry stepped through the door he saw a large conference table with many chairs around it.

At the end of the table sat one of the oldest goblins Harry had ever seen. He walked up to the goblin, bowed slightly and extended his hand saying “Director Ragnok, it is a pleasure to meet you.”

Ragnok took Harry’s hand with a firm shake and a look of amusement in his eyes. “Mr. Potter, you are an unusual wizard. I’m over 400 years old and you are the first wizard to offer me his hand as an equal.”

“Well Director, I’m used to not being like everyone else and one of the few benefits of my upbringing is that I wasn’t exposed to the Wizarding world’s bigotry. And please, call me Harry, I’m just Harry.”

Ragnok smiled. For someone who had never seen a goblin smile it struck Harry as quite feral and he wasn’t sure if he committed a serious breach of etiquette until the Director spoke again, “Well Harry, then I insist you call me Ragnok. Come and sit. We have much to discuss.”

Ragnok took out a huge sheaf of papers. “Harry you are here today at the behest of your late godfather Sirius Black. We found out about his

false imprisonment two years ago and we treated him as the legal head of the Black family even if the Ministry had not yet publicly acknowledged it. Normally a will reading for a family such as the Blacks would be scheduled well in advance so that all the people named in the will could attend. This will take place on the fourteenth. However your godfather felt that there were certain parties who may try to stop you from attending.”

Harry was beaming – he had read the situation correctly. “Yes Ragnok, in fact the Headmaster wrote me this morning saying that I would not be allowed to come for the will reading citing security concerns. I had hoped after reading my godfather’s letter last night that something like this would take place. That is why I gave the Headmaster the permission to act on my behalf on that specific day.”

Ragnok smiled even wider now. “Harry, Sirius knew the Headmaster would make such a request. He was hoping for that and the part of the will that will be read on that day will make more sense now. I don’t want to spoil the surprise, but Dumbledore will get exactly what he asked for. Now, down to business; Harry we will be doing a number of things today in a particular order. I have a letter here from Sirius. You need to read it and then let me know if you accept.”

Harry took the letter and opened. The familiar scrawl of his godfather’s handwriting covered the parchment.

Prongslet,

If you are reading this then I’m dead. I don’t want you to mourn this old dog. I may not have had the best of lives, but I was able to spend my early adult life with your parents and Remus and I was able to get to know and love my godson before I died.

Harry you mean the world to me and for this I ask one last thing of you. As you may know, I am the Head of the Black Family – a family known for being pretentious, bigoted, dark wizards. I wasn’t even supposed to become the head. However when my father and brother passed away without any other direct heirs, I inherited the head of house and the title of Lord Black. In some ways it was sweet revenge against the family that shunned me.

Harry, I want the Black family to keep changing for the better, however I don't have a direct heir. Harry I want to adopt you. I was going to ask you when you got out of school for the summer, but I guess it was not meant to be. You would be my son and carry both the Black and Potter names and it would not diminish your recognition as the last of the Potters.

It is my hope that you will consent to this. In order to be recognized as my son and inherit the head of the Black household, you will have to perform a blood ritual in which some of my blood must mix with yours so you can become a Black by blood and truly be my son.

You will need to give Director Ragnok your answer before we can move on.

Padfoot

Harry was speechless. Sirius wanted him enough to be his father? He didn't know what to feel. That crazy old dog actually chose him to be his son, him just plain old Harry. There was only one thing he could do.

"Ragnok, I'll do it"

Ragnok smiled and produced an odd bowl covered in ancient runes and a vial of red liquid that was no doubt Sirius' blood. "Now Harry, there is a sharp point at the bottom of this bowl. You need to press your finger against it until you start to bleed. You must hold it there while I empty this vial into the bowl. Once the blood is reabsorbed you can remove your hand. This may sting a bit."

Harry had the feeling the way Ragnok said the last piece meant it would hurt like hell.

"In for a knut in for a galleon" he muttered as he pressed his finger against the point. Immediately his blood started to pool at the bottom of the bowl. Ragnok started muttering something in a language unfamiliar to Harry. As Ragnok emptied the vial, the runes on the bowl started glowing. Harry looked and as Sirius' blood mixed with his

it started being drawn up into his finger. There was a burning pain spreading from his finger along his arm and into his body. He woke up a short time later.

Ragnok smiled again, "There, that wasn't so bad was it Harry? You are now Mr. Potter-Black, or would you rather be Mr. Black-Potter?"

"I think I like Potter-Black, it has a better ring to it. Un, Ragnok, who needs to know about this?"

"Well, Gringotts now recognizes you as Harry Potter-Black. We do have to file with the Ministry but there is a chance it could get caught up in red tape and not be filed until, say the fourteenth."

"Perfect Ragnok. Thank you. What is next on today's agenda?"

"Well Harry, we can move on to Sirius' will. Sirius wanted you to hear this and claim your inheritance as soon as possible. He did however state that you could invite any other beneficiary to this reading if you trusted them. There are clauses in the will which you may not want anyone else to know about for now."

"Ragnok, there are only four people I would trust with my life and well-being right now. They are Hermione Granger, Neville Longbottom, Luna Lovegood and Remus Lupin. Are any of them mentioned in the will?"

As Ragnok looked through the will, Harry reflected that there was not a single Weasley on the list. He wasn't sure where they stood right now. Ever since the DoM night, the only Weasleys who had contacted him were the twins. They had sent him a "care" package with many of their best and newest products and congratulated him for the capture of the Death Eaters. They were also very sympathetic and surprisingly quite tactful when they mentioned Sirius.

"Well, Harry, Mr. Lupin and Ms. Granger are on the list. Would you like them to be here for the reading?" Harry nodded. Ragnok continued, "I will send a representative of the Bank right away to get them."

Scene Break

Hermione was sitting alone at her desk in front of a blank parchment. She was confused. She was trying to write a letter to Harry and the words were not coming. Now normally writing Harry had come naturally and she would write just like she was speaking to him. The problem was not whom she was writing to, but what she was trying to write about.

The reason this letter was so hard to write is because what she wanted to say would not have been any easier to express face-to-face. Hermione was trying to tell Harry she felt something for him more than just friendship. What caused her even more grief was the fact that she was scared that he might not like her that way and it would ruin their friendship. She had even read relationship guides and other books and they were no help – she was completely lost.

To take her mind off things, she looked back at the note she received from the Headmaster this morning. He said for Harry's security she was not to contact him at all. In Hermione's mind this was pure crap. She knew Harry didn't like the isolation. He needed his friends – especially when he had to live with those "people".

She had figured that Dumbledore would try and pull another stunt like this and she was ready this year. She asked to borrow Hedwig to send a decoy message that would obviously never get to Harry. She would send her real letter via the muggle post and the stupid wizards would never be the wiser.

It was a clever plan if she did say so herself. The problem was now actually writing something.

It was in this state that she heard a 'pop' behind her and in an instant her wand was out and a glow was forming at the tip as she faced a ... goblin?

"Ms. Granger, I presume. I am sorry for startling you. I come on behalf of Director Ragnok and the Misterys Black. Your immediate presence is requested at Gringotts."

“May I take 5 minutes to get ready Mr. ...?”

“Fangtooth, Ms. Granger, and yes, you may have 5 minutes.”

“Thank you Fangtooth.” Hermione quickly got changed and came back into her room with 30 seconds to spare. “Um, Fangtooth, you mentioned Misters Black. I only know one Mr. Black and he died recently.”

Fangtooth grinned and this unnerved Hermione as much as it had Harry, “I did mention Misters Black and one of them was Sirius Black. The other will become clear shortly. Come, we must leave.” And with that he grasped Hermione’s arm and the bedroom was empty.

Scene Break

Remus Lupin woke up that morning reflecting on his life. He had just lost his last close friend and he was finding it hard to get past Albus to help His other friends’ son. No matter what he did to try and at least visit Harry, Albus or another member of the order was saying that it was for the greater good that he not see him.

He was working on his next plan when he heard a pop and a Goblin was standing in front of him.

“Mr. Lupin I apologize for my unannounced and uninvited appearance in your home. I come on behalf of Director Ragnok and the Misters Black. Your immediate presence is requested at Gringotts.”

Remus picked up on the plural and for the first time in weeks, Remus Lupin actually smiled.

“That old dog” he thought, “he did have it all planned out”. He looked at the goblin and said, “What are we waiting for? Let’s go.”

There was another pop and they were gone.

A/N – Next Chapter – The Will

Chapter 4 – Where There's a Will There's a Way

Hermione arrived at a set of double doors. When Fangtooth opened them she saw a large conference table and a very old goblin she assumed was the Director. Her heart leapt as she recognized the young man who was talking to the Goblin.

“Harry!” she ran over and enveloped him in a big hug. “I’m so happy to see you! Are you OK? Why are you here? Why am I here? Dumbledore wrote me a note saying you had to be isolated for your own safety and I wasn’t to contact you. How did you get here? The order will be going spare looking for you.”

“Whoa, Hermione,

Breathe. I’m happy to see you too. I’m fine and a lot better now that you are here. As for why we are here it’s for Sirius’ will. I’ll explain everything else once Moony gets here.”

At that moment the doors opened and the last true Marauder came in and embraced Harry.

“Hey pup. You don’t know how happy I am to see you. How are you holding up?”

“I’m fine Moony, no really I am” Harry said seeing the concerned glances from the other two since, for Harry, “I’m fine” could mean any physical state short of death.

“Hi Professor.”

“Hermione, I haven’t been your professor for a number of years. Please call me Remus or, better still, Moony.”

“OK Moony” she smiled.

Harry looked at the old goblin, “Ragnok, is it OK if I explained a few thing before we move on? I know you must be very busy and I don’t want to waste your time.”

“Oh, no problem Harry. When you arrived I changed my schedule to leave the whole day open for you if necessary. I always take involve myself personally when one of our oldest family clients is involved.”

Remus noted the familiarity between Harry and the old goblin and smiled and shook his head. Only Harry would be on a first name basis with Ragnok after having just met him.

Harry motioned Hermione and Moony to have a seat. Once they were comfortable, he started telling the events of the past 24 hours. He told them about the letter and the portkey (leaving out the rest of the papers for now). He described how his door had been unlocked and how the Dursley's were on vacation.

When he got to the part about Dumbledore's note, Remus was fuming and Hermione looked like she could have exploded.

“How dare that old coot,” she growled, “isolating you and trying to take your inheritance. I hope you told him to get stuffed.”

“Actually Hermione, I wrote him a nice note saying that I would not walk out the door of number 4 until it was safe to do so, and I gave him permission to represent me on the fourteenth. “ He noticed the shocked looks in both their faces. He grinned and continued, “I don't know exactly what he's up to, but I didn't want to start irritating him until I could plan an escape. Besides, I figured Sirius would have planned for this and that I'd be hearing the will today so there will be nothing of consequence for Dumbledore to get on the fourteenth. Since I got here by portkey, I never walked out of the house.”

They all laughed a bit at this. Suddenly Harry got an idea. “Do you two want to read the letter he left me?” Seeing them nod, he pulled out the letter and handed it to them. As they started reading he wondered what would happen if two people read it at once.

The blushes were immediate. Hermione sputtered “Wha, what? How could he write this about Remus and me? Harry what is this all about?” Remus just sat there very, very red.

Harry burst out laughing and fell off his chair. In between laughing fits he managed to say "I give permission for Hermione Granger and Remus Lupin to read the letter I have just given them," before he fell over again in another fit of laughter.

Hermione and Moony looked at the letter again and there was Sirius' writing to Harry. By the time they were finished, Harry had composed himself. Remus had a distant look in his eyes and Hermione was fighting back some tears.

"Sorry for the first part. I just wanted to test Padfoot's enchantment abilities on people I trusted first." At this Remus started laughing as well and Hermione had an amused smirk.

Harry continued, "as for the information he mentioned and the conspiracy, we can get to that later. I still need to get you caught up on one thing before we start the will. One of the last things Sirius did was start the process to adopt me." He paused, now with a beaming smile, "I went through the blood adoption process just before you two were sent for. I'm now Harry Potter-Black."

Remus grinned. He was right the old dog had done it. He was overjoyed.

Hermione was confused, "Blood adoption?"

"Basically it's different from a purely legal adoption in that I had to mix my blood with some from Sirius and it then drew back into my body. Since I now have Black family blood flowing through my veins, I am considered a full member of the Ancient and Noble House of Black while still retaining all my rights as a member of the House of Potter."

"I guess that catches us up." Harry said. He looked over at the old goblin, "Ragnok, I think we are ready to proceed."

Ragnok nodded in agreement and unbundled a short stack of parchment he had in front of him. He cleared his throat and began to read:

"I Sirius Black being of questionably sound mind and godlike body do hereby declare this my last will and testament. All previous wills are declared null and void. This will has been witnessed and certified by Director Ragnok of Gringotts."

Ragnok flipped the page, "Great, now that the legal crap is out of the way I can speak whichever way I want. If this page is being read then you are here Harry with the beneficiaries of my will who you completely trust. If I could guess right now I would have to say that Moony, and a certain cute bookworm are here with you."

Harry smiled that his godfather – no his FATHER – knew him so well. He looked over at Hermione whose face was twisted in such a way that she didn't know whether she should be offended or flattered.

Ragnok continued, "So, without further ado, let's get to the good part – me giving away the Black stuff to anyone but the family. To Hermione Jean Granger, I leave the entire contents of the Black library. Hermione, many people would say a number of the books are dark magic and should never be read. I trust that you have a good soul, a sharp mind, and a strong enough conscience to not use any magic with evil intent. If you do not know your enemy and what they can do, then you will surely fail."

Hermione was in awe. She had been in the library before and there were hundreds of books some of which were close to a millennium old. She had never been allowed to read any – Molly would not allow it. Now they were hers to read and study. Sirius obviously trusted her more than any other adult in the Magical world. She felt humbled by his words.

"Oh yeah, Hermione, when I said the entire Black library, I also meant the books which are contained in the Black vault in addition to the ones at Grimmauld. Second, leave you a sum of two million galleons, which is being deposited to your new vault that is being set up as this is read. The books will also be moved from the Black vault and Grimmauld place to your new vault until you can find another place to store them. The last thing I leave you is advice. Tell the person you love about your feelings. You see, he's a bit dense to the point where he can't see what is in front of him."

Hermione almost choked on the last bit. Just what did Sirius see that tipped him off? He was right though; she would have to take the initiative to get her wizard.

Ragnok looked at her, "Miss Granger do you accept this inheritance." Unable to speak at the moment she nodded. "Good, not if you will just sign this, your vault will be allocated and your gold and library moved to it."

He passed her a parchment and when she signed it, he passed her the key to her new vault.

Ragnok began again, "To my good friend Moony, I leave my entire wardrobe, two million galleons and the full set of my Marauders journals. My dear friend and brother, you can't refuse me this time. You must promise me though that you will share the journals with the two others in this room and most of all that you will take care of our pup and make sure he succeeds in what the fates have laid out for him."

Remus sat stoically with tears running down his face. He mouthed a barely audible, "On my magic and my honour as a Marauder I promise."

He also signed the parchment which Ragnok passed him and received a key in return.

The old goblin started reading again, "Now to Harry Potter-Black my son – Merlin that has a good ring to it – I leave the remainder of the estate. Ragnok can tell you the details, but I assure you that you will live comfortably no matter what you decide to do. Now Harry, take what you want and give the rest to whomever you feel like – it's yours now. Now a more important thing Harry – as my son you now inherit the title of Lord Black and become the head of the Black family. Just think of the look on Draco Malfoy's face when he learns that this title is not his. You see if I had no heir, it would have gone to the next Male heir in line that would have been Draco. Director Ragnok will now give you a box, if we have done this correctly you will be able to claim what is inside."

Ragnok gave Harry the box and he opened it cautiously. Inside was a ring. Ragnok informed him that this was the Black family Head of House ring. He knew that Sirius had died when the ring returned to its box at Gringotts. Harry picked up the ring and slid it on his finger. It resized itself to fit. Ragnok looked pleased "Congratulations Harry, the Black family has accepted you as its head and you may now use the title of Lord Black."

Ragnok announced that they could not complete the reading. "Harry, there is one more thing I can give you. Ragnok has signed emancipation papers. You are now considered an adult in the wizarding world with all the freedoms and responsibilities that go with it. Ragnok can remove the tracking charm on your wand before you leave. I love you son. Please take some advice from this old dog – Live your life to the fullest, make it through this conflict, and for Merlin's sake tell that girl your feelings. Don't mourn me pup, I don't regret a thing and I want you to remember that getting to know you and being able to spend time were some of the happiest experiences in my life. James and Lily would be so proud of the man you've become. "

After that last section there wasn't a dry eye around the table.

Ragnok waited for the group to compose themselves. He then pulled out another sheaf of parchment. "Harry, there is one more will here. Now that you are emancipated, you can claim your Potter inheritance. Would you like to hear your parent's will now, or at a later time?"

This new revelation shook Harry to the core. Hermione saw his reaction and went to sit beside him. She took his hand and said in a low, almost whispering voice " Harry, are you OK? You don't have to do this now."

Harry tightened the grip on her hand, "I'm alright, I think. It's just I never knew that they left me anything. I never really learned anything about my family and the news that there was a will and that I would get something from them when I was an adult is shocking to say the least. I thought my vault was the only thing my family had. Remus, why didn't anyone tell me?"

Remus looked a little nervous and almost refused to answer the question. Then as he started to speak he relaxed considerably. "Albus made all the other beneficiaries swear a wizard's oath not to reveal to you anything about the will or the Potter heritage – something about "the greater good". I guess that oath has run its course now that you know about the will. Only Albus knew what was in the will besides the sections that were meant for other people."

Harry seethed inside over the old man's actions. It was the type of secrecy he had come to expect from the man who had this obsessive need to control Harry's life. He smirked and thought, "That starts changing today. I'm taking control of my life and my destiny."

Harry spoke, "Ragnok if you would be so kind. I would like to hear the sections of the will that specifically pertain to me. All of the other sections were dealt with 15 years ago."

Ragnok read through the will and began, "To our son Harry, we leave the balance of the Potter estate to be given to him on the day he legally becomes of age. On that day he will also receive the Potter family ring and become the head of the House of Potter. Harry will also assume sole control of the access to Potter Manor and all of the associated grounds. The Potter house elves will also be loyal to him alone on that day until such time as he marries and has children. If we, his parents, should pass away before his coming of age, he should be given into care Sirius Black, his godfather who will be his legal and magical guardian. Should Sirius Black not be able to perform these duties, Harry should be given to one of the following guardians in this order: Remus Lupin, Frank and Alice Longbottom, Ted and Andromeda Tonks, or Arthur and Molly Weasley. Under no circumstances should Harry be given to our only remaining relative Petunia Dursley and her husband Vernon. The Dursley's hate the magical world and ourselves and we want Harry to grow up in a loving and caring environment aware of his heritage and the magical world."

Hermione felt the hand she was holding tighten its grip. Harry had an intense look on his face. This was the same look she had seen when he stared down Lucius Malfoy in the Hall of Prophecies.

Harry spoke his voice full of quiet anger and resentment. "That old bastard. He went against my parents' explicit wishes. I've lived most of my life ignorant of my heritage and the wizarding world. Before I went to Hogwarts I grew up friendless, beaten, abused and made to feel like I wasn't even worthy of the air I breathed. Ragnok, if this was in my parent's will, how come I went to the two people my parents expressly said I was not supposed to go to."

Ragnok sensed the flow of magical energy coming from this irate wizard. He had to calm the situation before one of his now largest clients lost faith in the Goblin nation. "Harry, when Dumbledore came to review the will, he used his powers as Supreme Mugwump to override the will. He claimed that you were already placed with guardians who would keep you safe and that you had to be hidden so that the remaining Death Eaters could not find you. He never revealed where you were and also got the Wizengamot to declare him your magical guardian. We had no choice but to follow the orders of the Wizengamot and the Supreme Mugwump."

Harry understood. Albus was a master of manipulation and used his powers and status to override the will. Harry decided to move past this for now. Ragnok had handed him a box with the Potter Ring. He put it on his other ring finger and it too accepted him and shrunk to size. He looked up and asked; "The will said something about Potter Manor. All of a sudden, I know where it is, how do I get there?"

He looked around the room, it seemed like the others had not heard him. "Hello?" They all looked at him. "Potter Manor?" They turned away again. This was very strange. "Ragnok, what about Potter Manor and the house elves?"

"Harry, you can summon your head elf just by calling him."

Harry was confused. Ragnok answered about the house elves, but every time he mentioned the Manor they acted as though they hadn't heard a word he said.

"I would like to meet the Potter head elf."

Almost immediately the elf appeared at Harry's side. "Master Potter, it is good to see you again. We have been waiting far to long for your return. My name is Jeeves."

"Hello Jeeves, please I do not like being called Master. Please just call me Harry and instruct the rest of the elves to do the same."

Harry was impressed with this well-dressed, well-spoken elf. "Jeeves, I have a ton of questions, but two come to the top. First most of the elves I know can't speak with even basic grammar but your English is excellent. Why is that? Secondly, why do the others in the room ignore me when I ask about Potter Manor?"

"Mas... Harry, your mother hated the way that most elves spoke and took it upon herself to teach the Potter elves how to speak properly. We now teach any younger elves to speak the same way. As for the Manor, powerful and ancient wards protect it so that only those granted access to the Manor can actually know about it. I can retrieve the book of access if you wish." Harry nodded and the elf disappeared and returned with an old book. Harry opened it. There were only two names on the page. – His and Albus Dumbledore's.

"Jeeves, can I take people off the list?"

"Yes Harry, as soon as they are removed, all memories of Potter Manor will be erased. They will never know that it existed. Look at the man across the table. He used to spend a lot of time with your father there, but he has no memories of it."

Harry erased Dumbledore's name and added Remus Lupin, and Hermione Jean Granger to the list.

In his office at Hogwarts, Albus Dumbledore felt fuzziness in his mind and the feeling that he had forgotten something but he just could not pinpoint what it was. It was very annoying.

Back at the bank Remus smiled. "Thanks you Harry, I just got a whole ton of memories back from my times with Sirius and your father."

Harry smiled. He looked at Ragnok, "Is there anything else for today?"

Ragnok looked at the papers, "There is no other pressing business. Would you all like to visit your vaults?"

They all agreed and followed Ragnok out the door.

A/N – I'm still kind of building the plot line. For those wondering about the identity of him you will still probably have to wait for a few more chapters. I will give you one hint – it's not Albus ;-). Harry will find more information about the conspiracy in his vaults but most of it will still remain a mystery. When everything is revealed, I think the mystery and suspense will be worth it.

Chapter 5 – My What Big Vaults You Have

The group walked back through the bank to get to the carts and the trip down to see the vaults. Remus, Hermione and Harry agreed to split up, visit their own vaults and meet back there later. Harry asked Jeeves to return to the manor and ask the cooks to have dinner ready for three this evening.

Harry once again found that he loved the roller coaster ride through the bowels of Gringotts. The first stop was the Black vault. As we walked up to the door, Ragnok informed him that only the Black family ring could open the vault. If Harry wanted anyone else to have access to the vault he could give him or her a duplicate of the ring with the limited power to open the door.

He touched his ring to the door and it opened smoothly. What Harry saw first were stacks and stacks of galleons. He knew now that he would never have to work a day in his life regardless of how long he lived.

He also noticed shelves and shelves of jewelery, artifacts, and other nasty looking items. Harry turned to Ragnok and asked, "When was the last time Sirius entered this vault?"

"Sirius never set foot in this vault. He always asked if a goblin could retrieve any gold for him. He always told me there were too many dark artifacts in this vault for him to every be comfortable. It remind him too much of the life he barely escaped."

"Now I understand why this place looks like it does. I didn't see any reminder of Sirius when I came in here. Ragnok, I have an idea. Can I request another vault be opened for me?"

"Of course Harry. There will be a small fee, however."

"That will be no problem. Can I also pay the Bank to remove everything from this vault which is not Galleons, Knut's, or Sickles from this vault and move it to the said new vault."

“But of course!” Ragnok took note with satisfaction that Harry offered to pay for the movement of the items where most wizards expected it would be free.

“Good. I will need a second key for that vault. I will probably be sending a person to sort through the items and have the darker ones melted down. Well I think I am finished here. No, wait there is one other thing I just remembered. Jeeves! Kreacher!”

Two elves appeared almost immediately. Harry knelt down to speak to Kreacher.

“Kreacher, I hold no malice toward you. You were only following instructions when you misled me and I now know who was giving the orders. Kreacher, I will have no more need for Grimmauld Place come the middle of this month. I will have the house emptied of its contents and then cleaned and sold. However I would like to give you a choice. You can choose to become a free elf in which case I will release you on the 14th. Your other option – and the one I hope you choose – is to join me at Potter Manor and you can join the rest of the elves as part of the staff there. This elf here is Jeeves and he is the Potter Head Elf. Before you make your decision I would like you to visit the manor. Jeeves can you please take Kreacher to Potter Manor and have him meet the other elves? Both of you can then join me at the Potter vault and Kreacher you can give me your decision.”

With that the two elves popped away.

“Ragnok, when do you think I will have my new vault created and all the moves made?”

“Your new vault is already ready. The move of any non-monetary objects from this vault will be completed tomorrow.”

“Ragnok, could I hire goblins to help me deal with number 12 Grimmauld Place? I need all the contents removed and the entire house cleaned and redecorated – something not as, - um - dark. All of the contents would have to be moved to my new vault. Oh, the property is under the fidelius set up by Headmaster Dumbledore how can I get rid of that?”

“Harry I can arrange that for you. As for the fidelius charm, it would have dissolved as soon as Mr. Black died. Shall I draw the fees for the move and renovations from this vault?”

“Yes please and thank you. If possible please schedule the work immediately.”

“You are very welcome and good for business Harry. Shall we go to the Potter vault now?”

“Lead the way Ragnok.” They got into the cart and continued on for a much shorter time.

“Ragnok, I may be here for an hour or so. You don’t have to wait around. You must have more pressing issues to attend to other than accompanying me. I also think I may find some items from my parents here so I would appreciate the privacy.”

“I understand Harry. I will return in an hour,” with that he left.

Harry turned to the vault door and as he put his ring up to the door he whispered, “Mom, Sirius mentioned that all you guys found out about the prophecy was here. I hope he was right because I need to know for sure.”

The door opened to a larger vault than the Black one was. There was gold everywhere. It was intoxicating and humbling at the same time. Harry had never had two knuts or even pence to rub together for most of his life and now he had more money than 50 Harrys could even deal with in a lifetime.

He noticed smaller doors in the other three walls. Opening the one on the left side, he found a room full of clothes most dating back hundreds of years. The door opposite the clothing room was full of armor and weapons such as swords and longbows.

He closed that door and went to the final one. As he opened it he blinked. He had just walked into a well-decorated flat. It looked like it belonged in the centre of London, not well under the centre of London.

He explored and found a living room, a nice kitchen, full bath, a larger master bedroom with King sized bed and a den. The den had the most interesting items to Harry. There was a desk with another large envelope on it and what appeared to be a pensieve in the corner. There was also a whole wall of bookshelves.

He looked at the envelope and was shocked. It was addressed to him. No one had been in this vault for almost 15 years. And here was an envelope address to someone who was not even two years old when it was written and sealed.

He opened the envelope carefully and emptied the contents. There was a smaller envelope inside as well as 8 crystal vials with a silvery liquid inside. Harry knew exactly why the pensieve was there – these were memories. The last item appeared to be an old copy of Hogwarts – A History.

Harry opened the smaller envelope and sat down in the desk chair as he began to read the letter.

October 27, 1981

Dear Harry,

If you are reading this letter then your father and I are probably already dead. I just hope that we got a few more years with you, but the darkness is closing around us. Dumbledore ordered us to move out of the Manor and into the house in Godric's hollow. He wanted us to keep watch there and since no one knows we moved other than Albus, Peter and Sirius we should be safe there. It breaks my heart that we didn't include Remus but Albus and Peter think he may be the person leaking information to Voldemort about our location.

Harry I fear that we are being set up. Sirius and I have gathered information about a large conspiracy in the wizarding world. Sirius has all the documents we collected and I have these vials and the book.

Harry, there was a prophecy made 500 years ago which seems will come to fruition in your lifetime. Harry, you are very important to that prophecy.

Harry read through the rest of the letter. It contained the prophecy and Lily's interpretation of it. She had done her homework thoroughly through her position at the DoM and her role as an Unspeakable.

The letter even identified the people he needed to work with. "Oh Merlin, not his name again. How the hell did she expect me to work with him? The other two are fine but ..., Crap! I have to just bite the bullet and do it. It's not like I have a lot of choice here."

The letter finished:

Harry, please be careful. I'm sorry I'm not in your life anymore. You brought Joy and happiness to both your father and myself this past year and a bit. We would not have traded this time for anything. Never doubt that we love you more than anything else in the world.

I have better get back now. I had Jeeves bring me to Gringotts without Albus and Peter knowing. I need to get back before they find out I'm gone.

Love, Mom

Harry had tears in his eyes. He thought, "Imagine sitting down and writing a letter to your toddler son knowing that if he ever reads it you'll be dead. She was incredibly brave."

Harry gathered himself together. He looked at his watch and figured we still had about half an hour before Ragnok returned. He put the letter and the vials back into the envelope. He'd get Jeeves to take the pensieve to Potter Manor. He picked up the old copy of Hogwarts – A History and said to himself, "I wonder why this old book is so important."

He sat down and opened it. The first thing he noticed was this particular edition was published in 1800. He started reading about the origins of Hogwarts and the Founders. As he read through the

chapters he realized something was wrong. "Hang on a second," he thought, "this is quite different than the book Hermione has read a hundred times. But why... oh, now I see ... that clever bastard!"

Harry put the book back in the envelope. More pieces of the puzzle had just fallen into place.

At this moment he heard a pop and the two elves had returned. Harry went over and knelt down to speak with Kreacher. "Well Kreacher, how was your visit."

"Master, Kreacher would very much like to serve at the Manor with the other elves."

"OK Kreacher. You may move to the manor on the fourteenth, however there are three things you must agree to."

"Will you be loyal to the combined houses of Potter and Black and their new Head?"

"Yes, Master."

"Will you be friendly to any one I may invite to the Manor regardless of their blood status?"

"Of course, Master"

"And will you stop calling me 'Master' and call me Harry like I've instructed Jeeves?"

"As you wish, M... Harry."

"Thank you Kreacher. Please go back to Grimmauld Place now and prepare the house. All of the contents will be moved by the goblins here to a vault in Gringotts until I decide what to do with them. Kreacher, I know there are several trinkets you are fond of. You may keep them and bring them with you to the manor on the fourteenth on the condition that I can inspect them. I do not want dark artifacts in my house and if any of them are tainted with dark magic, I will either

have the spells removed or I will have to have them destroyed. Do you agree to this?"

Kreacher was overjoyed, "Oh yes, Harry. Kreacher will go now and gather his belongings."

"Very well. Jeeves can you please also arrange for an elf from the manor to help Kreacher pack up Grimmauld Place? Oh, and Jeeves, can you take this pensieve back to the Manor for me as well?"

Jeeves nodded. Inside he was happy that his new master was just as kind to elves as his mother, their former mistress.

Once the elves went on their way, Harry took the large envelope and went back to the tunnel outside the vault. He got there just as Ragnok returned.

"I hope your visit was profitable Harry."

"Yes it was Ragnok, thank you. I think I'm just about finished my business for today. Have Mr. Lupin and Miss Granger returned to the bank yet?"

"Mr. Lupin has returned. Miss Granger is still in her vault surrounded by books."

Harry chuckled, "Can we go by there on the way back up? I'll see if I can get her to come out."

They boarded the cart and after a few minutes were several levels higher and outside Hermione's new vault. The door to the vault was still open and Harry could see her inside reading. He knocked. She didn't look up. He coughed. She didn't look up. Finally he said in the best imitation of McGonagall he could "Miss Granger, your transfiguration essay was below standard. I am very disappointed."

Hermione jumped up as if hit by an electric shock and looked around, "P-p-p-professor... HARRY!"

“Hey, it was the only way I could get your attention. May I come in to your vault?”

“Yes, of course.”

Harry walked in. “Hermione, you can’t expect to read all these books at once.”

“But Harry, I’ve learned so much. I can’t wait to get back to Hogwarts so we can start practicing some of these spells.”

“I know Hermione, but you can come back again. I want to invite you and Remus to come check out the Manor with me and have dinner there. Come on.” He reached out his hand to her. She took it and both reveled in the warmth of the other. He pulled her up and they were standing face-to-face. He looked into her eyes and knew then exactly what he wanted to do. Remembering Sirius’ words, he leaned forward and kissed her.

When he pulled her up Hermione found herself looking into his eyes and tried to draw up the courage to follow Sirius’ advice from the will. She was just about to say something when Harry kissed her. She was startled, shocked, and thrilled to bits.

The kiss seemed to last an eternity when in reality it was about 20 seconds. As they broke apart they both looked at each other and said, “I have something to tell you.” They smiled. Harry once again reached for the courage and blurted out, “.”

“Oh yeah very smooth Romeo,” a little voice said inside his head, “good thing you kissed first.”

Hermione took a moment to parse what he said. She looked at him and smiled. “Harry, Sirius in his will advised me to express my feelings to the person I love. He’s right I really need to do that. Harry James Potter, I’m really like you and I’m pretty sure that I love you. I would love to be your girlfriend.” They both smiled. This time Hermione leaned forward and kissed him. It was much better than the first.

They broke apart. Harry just had a big grin on his face. She smiled and said, "I'm looking forward to practicing that a lot more. You are right though we should be going. However I'm coming back tomorrow for some books."

They clasped hands and walked out of the vault that closed behind them. They got into the cart with Ragnok and rode back to the surface smiling.

When they got back to the bank, Remus was waiting for them. He saw their hands and smiled. "Well, it's about time."

Harry rolled his eyes, "Moony was it that obvious?"

"Yes it was pup. We could all see you had it bad for each other. A few of us even had a pool going. I think Tonks is several galleons richer."

Harry glared at him.

"Hey don't get mad at me. Sirius set it up."

Harry shook his head and sighed. He looked back at Moony, "Would you like to join us at the Manor for a tour and some dinner?"

"I would love to. Thanks, Harry"

Harry turned to Ragnok, "Ragnok, thank you for your services today to both the Black and Potter families. May I contact you in the next week? I want to prepare for the reading of the rest of Sirius' will on the fourteenth and I may also have need of some other services."

"Of course Harry, I am always willing to help such old and esteemed clients. I would like to suggest that we appoint an account manager to handle your day to day affairs."

"That is an excellent idea Ragnok. May I request Griphook? He was the first goblin I ever met and he treated me with respect even though I was only 11."

"I was going to suggest him. Griphook!"

The other goblin appeared. "Yes Director."

"Harry has asked that you be assigned as his account Manager for the Black and Potter accounts"

Griphook was floored. This was a huge promotion to handle not just one but two old family accounts. He turned to Harry, "Mr. Potter, I am honoured by your request and will make it my goal to maximize the profitability of your investments."

"Griphook, it is my pleasure. I will be contacting you in the next week to go over my finances and investments."

They said goodbye to the Goblins and Harry summoned Jeeves. "Jeeves, how do I get to the Manor?"

"Harry, the power is in your ring. It is like a portkey. Touch the stone with your finger and say 'Take me home' anyone touching you at the time will be transported as well."

"Thank you Jeeves." He held out his arm to Hermione, "Milady?" She put her hand on his shoulder.

Remus said, "Harry I can apparate there now that I know where it is again. I'll see you there shortly."

Harry touched his ring and with a happy voice said "Take me home."

With a soft pop they were gone.

Chapter 6 – Mind Your Manor(s) Mr. Potter

Harry and Hermione appeared in a large entrance hall. An elegant staircase was in front of them and led to the second floor. Harry summoned Jeeves and asked him to take them on a tour at around the same time Remus arrived.

Jeeves showed them the main floor that consisted of a library, sitting room, formal dining room, breakfast area and kitchen. The tour was almost over as soon as it had started and Hermione nearly had to be dragged out of the library. Behind the house were a swimming pool and a smaller building that housed a weight room and a training gym.

The second floor of the house consisted mainly of five large guest bedrooms with ensuite washrooms and a very large master bedroom.

Throughout the tour, Harry and Hermione never stopped holding hands – a fact which was not lost on Remus. Sirius and him had spent many a night plotting how to get these two together. Sirius (not to mention James and Lily) would be so overjoyed right now. Harry deserved to be happy and he could not think of a better witch for him to end up with.

Once the tour was finished it was getting near dinnertime. Hermione asked Jeeves if he would deliver a note to her parents explaining whom she was with and that she would be home following dinner. Jeeves waited for her to write the note and then disappeared and reappeared 10 minutes later with a note from her parents indicating their approval.

Dinner was an easy-going affair. Harry's elves outdid themselves for their new Master (which is how they referred to him when he was not around).

Shortly after dinner, Remus excused himself. Before he left Harry asked him, "Hey Moony, can I ask you a favour?"

"Sure pup."

“Well, I had the goblins open up a special vault for me and they moved everything but the money from the Black vault into it and the contents of 12 Grimmauld will be going into it as well. I need someone to check the items for dark curses so that we can deal with them separately. I was hoping you could, I need someone I can trust. I thought maybe when you have spare time...”

Remus replied, “Of course I’ll do it for you. I’m glad to see that you are taking precautions. I remember Sirius saying that some of his family “heirlooms” can be quite nasty.”

Harry quickly wrote a note to Gringotts and gave it to Remus. “Here this will authorize the goblins to give you a key to the vault. Oh, and can you come back on Friday? We need to plan for the will reading.” Harry had a cocky smirk on his face.

Remus noticed the look and recognized that same look on his father years ago. “You really have the Marauder’s spirit Harry. I’ll be here.”

With a pop he was gone.

Harry turned to Hermione. Both teenagers realized that they were alone in a house by themselves and no parents or adults were expected. Harry broke the silence. “Hermione, we need to talk.”

She nodded with a worried look on her face. Harry sensed her nervousness and then realized how serious he had just sounded. He smiled at her and took her hand in his. And leaned close and kissed her on the cheek. This seemed to relax her a bit and they went into the sitting room. They sat down together on a large sofa.

Before he could say anything, Hermione said, “Harry is everything OK.”

He shook his head, “No, it’s not. I mean I should be on top of the world right now. My beautiful best friend is now my girlfriend and I even managed to kiss her today without her bursting into tears.”

Hermione’s heart soared at the “beautiful” and “girlfriend” remarks.

“My godfather loved me enough to want to become my father and even saw to it so that I was free to now make my own decisions. However ...” he paused and looked at the witch in front of him. She was the one person who had stood by him for the past 5 years. The person who cared for him enough to challenge him when she thought he was being reckless. He trusted her with his life. He could trust her with this right now. His mother even suspected that she was one of the people in the prophecy. Telling her this would put her in even more danger.

“Hermione, Sirius and my mom left me information which has left me feeling overwhelmed. I would like to share it with you, but I need you to know that there are people out there who would kill you if they suspected that you knew this.”

Hermione smiled, “Harry, one of the things I’ve realized being your friend is that my life is in danger. I’m already a target for being your friend. I’ll be an even bigger target once people know I’m your girlfriend.”

Harry started to interrupt. Hermione stopped him by saying, “And don’t you get noble on me and try to break this off. I realized that I’d been waiting a long time to express my feelings to you so you can just forget about that.” With that she leaned forward and kissed him passionately. When they broke apart she continued, “That is worth all the danger and risk. Harry, think about it. I’m a muggle-born witch. I can either risk my life by your side, or sit around and wait until I’m one day killed by Death Eaters. I choose to fight and stand by the wizard I love.”

Harry was stunned. That was some kiss. He never knew a kiss could be that ... WOW. He looked at Hermione. She had finished speaking and was looking at him. What had she said? Oh yeah something about being a target and then ... THAT KISS! After the kiss what did she say? Oh, yeah something about fighting beside me instead of waiting to get attacked and ... LOVE?? That stunned him all over again.

Hermione looked at Harry and smirked. She saw his eyes had a glazed-over look since she kissed him and watched different waves

of realization hit him over and over again. "I think I broke him," she laughed to herself. She leaned forward and kissed him again.

Harry felt the kiss and that brought him back to the world. Actually it was his brain saying to him, "Yo, lover boy. There's another kiss going on. Get back here or you'll miss it!"

When they finally broke apart this time Harry had regained the ability to speak. "Y-You love me?" She nodded. He looked into her eyes and image passed through his brain – The troll, the hunt for the stone, sitting by her bedside for nights on end when she was petrified, riding Buckbeak with her, her being the only person to talk to him before the first task, the feeling when he saw her come down for the Ball, her tending to his hand after detentions last year, her by his side at the DA, at the Ministry... "I love you too." And he kissed her again.

When they broke apart again, Hermione said, "What did you want to tell me?"

"OK, this may take a while and I don't have all the details, and I'll need your help to figure out everything. But first things first, I need you to cast a spell."

"Harry, you know I'm still underage."

Harry thought about this. The spell had to be cast with your own wand. "Jeeves?" The elf appeared. "Jeeves, can the ministry track underage magic here? This place is unplottable right?"

Jeeves nodded, "Your father and his friends used to practice magic over the summers all the time. Since the manor is unplottable all the actions that occur here are unplottable. Tracking charms are useless and you even have to give owls permission to find it. Before you say anything Harry, I found out about Hedwig and have given her permission to find this place. I have even prepared the largest space in the Owlry for her."

"Thank you Jeeves."

“So I can practice magic here?” Hermione looked like a kid in a candy store.

Harry nodded, “Apparently so.” Harry grabbed a piece of parchment, “Here, point your wand at this and say ‘Ostendo Meus Prosapia’.”

Hermione performed the spell and words started filling the parchment. She started reading with Harry. Eventually she got to one section and her eyes went wide “Is this true?”

“Apparently so. My mom wrote about what mine says and it has another one on it.”

“Harry do you realize what this means?”

“Yes, more than you do. I have some things for you to read.” He pulled the envelopes from Sirius and Lily out of his robes. He gave her the ones for Sirius. “Sirius hid these in my room at Privet Drive on his way to the Ministry that night. You read the first page earlier, it’s time you read the rest.”

She started reading and after about 15 minutes she looked at him coyly and said, “You know, these are still charmed.”

“What! I give Hermione Granger permission to read all the documents. Why didn’t you tell me?”

“Well the story this time was about me and you and I quite enjoyed it.” Her face was beet red. She went back to reading.

It was well over half an hour before Harry recovered this time.

When Hermione finished the last page she was in shock. “We have to include Him? I can’t believe it! He thinks I’m nothing but a know-it-all mudblood and he hates you!”

“I know. I’m still trying to deal with this myself.” He handed her Lily’s letter. “Read my mom’s now.”

It didn't take Hermione very long to finish it. "So your mother figured that She was part of this too? I would have never seen this coming."

"Hermione, when you think about it she is a very powerful witch in her own right. We need to find some way to contact her. We need to meet. It's Monday today, let's try and meet here Wednesday night."

Hermione nodded, "I can get Her to come. How are we going to get Him to come as well? Are there any others?"

"I'll add Her to the book tonight. Don't worry about Him. I've already got an idea on how to get him to come. As for others, you read my mom's note. She knows there will be more in our core group but the prophecy was vague about who they are. You see the list of possibilities but we were the only four she was sure about."

Hermione glanced at her watch, "Harry it's getting late and my parents are going to start to worry. I should head home."

"I know," he said. He reached over and grabbed the old book he got from his mother, "You've memorized the latest edition of this. This edition is around 200 years old. I want you to read it. It poses more questions."

Hermione took the book and took his offered hand. He walked her to the front foyer and called Jeeves. "Jeeves, how can I get Hermione home?"

"Your ring Harry. It's a portkey that acts similar to the floo. Just say the destination clearly and touch your ring and you will be there. There is a limitation – either your starting point or ending point must be the Manor."

Scene Break

Harry and Hermione popped into existence in her parents' back yard. To the couple it was a lovely July evening. However given their obvious and complete attention on each other, there could have been in a hurricane or a blizzard and they still would have considered it a lovely evening.

Harry walked her to the door and they shared another kiss. As Hermione bade Harry good night and went inside, Harry touched his ring again and headed back to the Manor.

Hermione's parents were sitting in the study reading when she came upstairs. "Hi pumpkin" said her father as he saw her, "have a good evening?"

"Hermione was lost in her own world and just giggled and said dreamily "Yeah. I think I'm going to my room to read a bit before I go to bed. 'Night Daddy."

Dan Granger looked at his wife, "What's up with her? Hermione has never giggled and she's called me Dad or Father since she was eight."

Jane pondered for a moment and then got up. Just as she was leaving the study she remembered her husband and with a similar smile to her daughter's said, "I'll go talk to her."

Jane walked down the hall and knocked on Hermione's door, "Mione, can I come in?"

"Sure Mom. What's up?"

Jane had a Cheshire-like grin as she walked in and saw her still-smiling daughter curled up in her favourite chair with a rather old book. The snowy white owl perched by the window was a surprise, but Jane was used to things like this after five years with a student witch for a daughter. "So," she said, "who is he?"

Hermione looked up from her reading, "What are you talking about?"

"Give me some credit Hermione. I've known you all your life and I've never seen you this girly. Either you are in love, or you're drunk."

"Mom, I haven't been drinking. I'm too young. You know my feelings about under-age alcohol consumption. Why it's just..."

Jane held up her hand to stop her from getting too far into her rant, "Now that is my daughter. So, I noticed you didn't deny being in love. So I will ask again, who is he?"

Hermione blushed and mumbled something.

"I didn't quite get that."

"Harry."

"Harry? As in the Harry who rescued you from that Ogre in first year?"

"That was a Troll mother. They are completely different things."

"Don't change the subject on me. Harry, as in your best friend for the past 5 years who you swore last summer was more like a brother?"

"Yes, mother – that Harry."

"And how does he feel about this? I'm assuming he knows."

"Of course he knows. We realized we both felt the same way about each other today at the reading of his godfather's will. Oh yes, by the way I'm rich now."

"Rich? Save that one for a bit. You found out at the will reading? How romantic."

"Mother, you don't need to be so sarcastic. Harry's godfather was a prankster and very outspoken. He basically wrote in his will that we should just be honest with each other and finally get around to snogging."

Jane stifled a laugh and said very seriously, "And did you?"

"Yes we did talk about our feelings for each other."

"No, I meant the part about the snogging," Jane could barely keep the stern look on her face.

Hermione turned a deep crimson, “Er ... well ... about that ... Oh hell. Yes we did and I loved it!”

“Hermione Granger,” her mother finally smiled, “it’s about bloody time. I mean for the past five years all your letters and any talks we’ve had about school have included Harry Potter. I’ve known you were falling in love since about halfway through your first term when your letters stopped being miserable little statements of fact to bright colourful letters about the magical world, school, and most importantly your first real friend Harry. I am so happy for you.”

Hermione allowed her happiness back out and beamed at her mother. “Thanks, mom.”

“Now what’s this about being rich?”

Scene Break

When Harry got back to the manor he started planning. He had two weeks until everything started to come out and he had to get his group together and start preparing. Kreacher was set with number 12. The Order was not going to go back into the house until they found out who owned it. Any changes to his status would not be filed with the Ministry until the fourteenth as per his agreement with Ragnok. He would go back to Privet Drive every night and be there in the morning so he was seen at times through the windows sulking.

He looked at the list of people that Lily and Sirius thought were important. Well, I’ve got Hermione (His thoughts chimed in “In more ways that one.”), Hermione would contact the next person on the list and she won’t be hard to convince. He looked at the fourth name and furrowed his brow. “How do I get him even to listen to me? It’s not like he ever has before.”

Slowly an idea came to him. His brow smoothed out and his smile appeared.

He said out loud to no one, “Perfect.”

He stood up and touched his ring, "The Shrieking Shack, Hogsmeade".

Harry appeared in the shack. This was perfect! He looked around and found the right room. Single table, never-snuff candles on both sides (Sirius had told him the Marauders has enchanted and lit them in fifth year – they never figured out how to put them out) and a few chairs. He thought, "This is the perfect meeting place, out of the way but convenient to get to and everyone knows where it is."

He went back to the manor and then to Privet drive. He turned on some lights, walked around past some windows for a while and then packed himself off to bed. About 10 minutes later he snuck back to the manor and used his Patronus to send a message to Him. Hermione had studied Patronus and their uses when he was teaching them to cast them during the DA sessions. They had a use to send messages. The Patronus was untraceable and could deliver a message through any wards. He thought of the message, the recipient and tried to cast the spell. It took three tries since thinking of Him was not exactly conducive to good memories. He glanced at his watch. "OK I have half an hour to get ready."

Harry went to the study and pulled out the vials he got from his mother's envelope. Choosing the number 1 he poured it into the pensieve and entered the memory. Twenty minutes later he emerged, put the memory back into the vial and headed off to his meeting.

Scene break

Harry sat at the table. He held the letter from his mother in his hands. The parchment almost glowed in the light of those silly candles. "Soon, very soon" he thought.

There was a movement and a figure in a billowing black cloak entered the room.

"Potter. Why have you summoned me here? I don't have time for your games."

“But yet you came. You know why you came. I know why you came. You came for answers to the questions I posed to you. You are just as curious as I am about the reason why many of the things that happen around us happen the way they do. You want to know why your life has been manipulated and why you continue to be manipulated to this day. I have some of the answers with me but I these answers I will share will only lead to more questions for now.” He handed over the letter. “You remember my mother Lily? Of course you do. She and my godfather dug up some information working as Unspeakables. This just scratches the surface.”

The man in black picked up the letter and read. Once he was finished, he looked directly at Harry, “If this is true...”

“It is and, yes, I know what you are thinking about our glorious Headmaster right now. I have one other item I have brought with me here. It is a memory I viewed in a pensieve.” He smirked, “If I remember correctly, you dabble in legilimency. After having read what you have and seeing your expression, I am inviting you into my mind to see this memory and this one only. If we are going to work together, we have to get over our past differences and try and trust each other. This is the first test.”

Harry looked into his eyes and felt a stirring in his head he brought forth the memory from the pensieve. He knew this one would strike a very personal cord with the man in front of him. As soon as the memory was over the Harry felt him withdraw.

Anger burned in the man’s eyes. But for the first time, Harry knew it was not directed at him. “What’s the next step Potter?”

The four of us will meet in a safe location Wednesday evening at 8pm. There will only be the four of us plus my house elves.

“Where is this place?”

“If I told you about it now you would not understand or even hear me. It is an unplottable location and I control access. Wednesday I will grant you access and will send you another message via patronus to verify. You will be forced to come alone. Only those with explicit

permission can get anywhere near the location. If I remove your access you will forget about the place once more. Dumbledore already doesn't know he used to have access."

"How can I trust you?"

"I think based on our history a better question is how can I trust you? I've already thought of that – watch." Harry raised his wand, "I hereby swear on my magic that there will only be the four people involved and my elf staff at the meeting on Wednesday night should it come to pass. I also swear on my magic that I will not actively cause harm nor seek to cause harm to any of the other three people at the meeting should it come to pass." Harry was surrounded by a glow as the oath took effect. He smirked, "your turn. I will also make sure the other two say the oath before the meeting."

"There will be no others present?"

"The only other person who has permission won't be there. Wednesday is the full moon and you may remember his furry little problem."

The figure looked at him and raised his wand; "I swear on my magic that I will not actively cause harm nor seek to cause harm to any of the other three people at the meeting should it come to pass." He was bathed in a golden glow as his oath took effect.

Harry looked on, "You must really be starting to believe this. That oath was a bit too freely given."

"Potter, I have to admit you have given me something to think about. I await your message on Wednesday. Until then I have things to think about."

With that the figure turned and left the room. With his cape billowing behind him he disappeared from view into the darkness.

Harry let out a breath he didn't know he was holding and smiled inwardly, "That went a lot better than I ever thought it would."

Harry left thinking about the next 48 hours and the work that needed to be done.

Chapter 7 – And Then There Were Three

Harry woke on Tuesday morning in his bed on Privet Drive. He had not slept very well quite frankly could do without the feeling of an elephant stepping on his brain. As he gazed around the room, he wondered if it had all been a dream. Only one way to find out, “Jeeves?”

The elf popped into his room right by the doorway as they had discussed so he would be hidden from view. “Yes Harry?”

Harry was overjoyed. If Jeeves was here then everything else must have happened as well. “Can you please ask the cooks if they could make me some breakfast and deliver it to the kitchen downstairs in about half an hour? I’m going to have a shower and get dressed in the meantime. I need to stay here for a few more hours. Also, can you deliver a message to Hermione around 9am? I’d like to meet at the Manor at 10 if possible.” Jeeves nodded once and left immediately.

Harry showered and went back into his room to get dressed. He made sure he moped past the window every so often and looked wistfully outside. After a few more minutes he decided to go downstairs and wait for breakfast.

/Scene Break/

Hermione came down to breakfast with her parents in much the same way as she had almost every day since she turned three – with her nose in a book. This morning her focus was on the book she thought she knew by heart. So many things had been changed. She sighed, “This explains a lot. Why can’t people just get along? Oh, hi mom, hi daddy!”

Dan looked at his daughter, “Alright, what’s going on? Your mother has had a big-ass grin on her face since last night and she refuses to tell me anything about what you two talked about – she just said it’s your story to tell. Now, will you tell me?”

Hermione started to speak but was interrupted by the sudden appearance of Jeeves. "Miss Granger, my Master wishes to meet you at the manor at 10am. Will that be acceptable?"

"Yes, Jeeves, will you be coming back for me? Wait a second I thought he told you not to call him Master?"

"The Master told me not to call him Master directly. He did not say anything about referring to him as my Master when speaking to others. Yes, I will be back at 10am." And with a snap of his fingers he was gone again.

She smiled and shook her head. What was it about Harry and house elves? Any elf that Harry had personal contact with would begin to develop an independent personality and become fanatically devoted to Harry. You just had to be around Dobby for about 5 minutes to see what years around Harry can do to an elf.

Her father looked at her, "What was that?"

"Oh, that was Jeeves. He's Harry's head house elf. In the magical world they act as the staff in larger houses. Hogwarts has several elves that do all the cooking and cleaning at the castle. I used to be against the whole idea until I saw that an elf's magical energy derives from the family or estate they are bonded to. Very few free house elves survive."

"Oh. And you say Jeeves is Harry's house elf. Is this the same Harry you write about from school?"

Hermione blushed, "The same one, Daddy."

"But I thought he lived with his aunt and uncle who really don't care for him. How can he have a house elf?"

"Well, Harry's godfather died in June."

"At the same time you were injured."

“Yes. Well, yesterday was the will reading.” Hermione proceeded to tell him about the will reading and Harry’s adoption, inheritance, emancipation and second inheritance. She managed to find a way to insinuate Harry had a new home that her parents could understand. Those wards were pretty tricky. Finally she told Dan about what Sirius had bequeathed to her.

“Two million galleons? What is that in Pounds?”

“Well the exchange rate fluctuates, but its roughly 10 million Pound.”

Dan felt like he had just me the wrong end of a Cricket bat. He was stunned.

Hermione giggled again. She remembered her mother’s reaction from last night.

/Flashback/

“Now what’s this about being rich?”

“Well, Sirius – that’s his name – left me a three things. There was the advice I told you about,” her blush returned, “and he left me 2 million galleons and his entire family library. You should see all the books I have now! Most of them are quite rare and valuable. I didn’t know where to start. Did you know...”

Her mother interrupted her, “Dear, you know I don’t quite understand the wizard monetary system. Are 2 million galleons a lot? I mean, if the galleon was worth as much as say, an Italian Lira, you might have enough to pay for school this year.”

“Well the exchange rate does fluctuate a bit, but it’s basically 5 Pound to the galleon.”

“That’s, that’s TEN MILLION POUND!” Jean had to steady herself. She felt faint.

She looked at her daughter. Her little girl was sitting there with a book acting as nothing had happened and in one day she got a boyfriend

and was now independently wealthy in either world she chose to live in. And she was sitting there as if nothing out of the ordinary had happened. Jane did the only thing her brain let her do.

She fainted.

/End Flashback/

Dan hadn't fully recovered yet. He was still staring straight ahead.

Hermione saw the look. It was the look her mother had just before she fainted. She decided to say the next bit of news while he was out of it n hopes it might not register, "Daddy, I also have a boyfriend – it's Harry," she whispered.

Now the thing that Hermione hadn't counted on was the fact that every father of a teenage girl has certain words wired into alarm centres in his brain. "Boyfriend" is near the top of the list.

Hermione was shocked as her father turned towards her, "Boyfriend?" he asked.

"Um, yeah."

"Harry? The same boy you've written to us about? The same one who you just told me inherited two estates yesterday?"

"Yes, that's the one."

"Are you happy?"

"Incredibly."

"I figured when you started giggling and calling me Daddy." He smiled. "I want to meet him. Can you invite him over for dinner tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow's not a good day. We have to meet some people in the evening."

"How about Saturday?"

"I'll ask Harry this morning. It should be OK."

"I look forward to meeting him." Dan said this in a way that she was not sure exactly what he meant.

"I have to go get ready now. See you later Daddy!"

/Scene Break/

Harry was waiting in the sitting room for Hermione. He was going over what he wanted to get done in preparation for the meeting tomorrow. He went over the meeting he had last night. It went much better than he had expected. Harry had thought that it would take a lot more persuasion to get Him to take the oath.

The most important thing on his agenda today was to visit the fourth person they needed for tomorrow. "I wonder how she'll react?" he thought. "Does she even suspect anything?"

Harry was feeling a bit guilty as well; "I wish I didn't have to involve her in this. I already feel bad that Hermione is mixed up in this, but if what we suspect is true, she is critical to the prophecy. I hope she understands and is willing to help us."

His thoughts moved on to Hermione – his best friend who was now his girlfriend. "Wow, who would have seen this coming? Apparently everyone but us." He chuckled at the thought. He knew he was clueless when it came to girls.

He was interrupted from his thoughts by a small cough. He looked up and saw Hermione standing in the doorway smiling at him. He returned the look, and walked over to her and hugged her. "Good morning," he said, "have you had breakfast? The elves make a mean omelette."

"Thank you but I had breakfast with my parents." Hermione gave him a quick kiss. "Hmm I could get used to this."

“Me too.” Harry moved back and smiled at her. “I need to tell you about what happened and what I learned last night.”

She nodded, “I learned some stuff as well from the book. Someone has been tampering with history.”

“It’s such a nice morning. Let’s go out for a walk and talk. Jeeves?”

The elf appeared, “Yes Harry?”

“Is there any place outside to walk on the grounds?”

“Oh yes. The manor is on about 200 hectares of land. There are a number of walkways through the trees that interconnect the Manor and the guest houses?”

“Guest houses?”

“Yes, your ancestors did not like the idea of one huge building dominating the property. They wanted the buildings to blend in with the forest and not dominate it. To that end, they built the more modest manor you are in now and five three-bedroom guest houses around the estate.”

“Thank you Jeeves. Hermione and I will be going out for a walk. If we are not back by 1 pm, can you please come and get us? We’d like to have a light lunch for two at that time if it is no problem.”

“Yes Harry. The cook is happy to have a new Lord Potter to cook for.”

Harry smiled and headed out back with Hermione. They took a path at random and walked through the forest holding hands.

Harry told her about his evening with the trip to Hogsmeade and his message to Him, “That was a brilliant idea to use your patronus. I like the way you phrased the message as well to be sure to catch his attention. I’m a bit concerned that you went alone to the meeting though.”

He explained the meeting to her. "So you see why I had to go alone? Besides, if we are going to have to work together we need to start building up trust. I figured the sooner I tested that the better. He even took an oath." Harry told her about the oath he took first and then the oath He freely gave.

Hermione was shocked, "He gave you his oath that easily? He must have really been intrigued by what you said."

"Well it wasn't as much as what I said rather what I showed him."

"What do you mean?"

Harry didn't know how she was going to take this next revelation, "Well, before I met him, I viewed one of the pensieve memories my mother left me. It was one that showed just how early the manipulation in his life started. I then lethiminmymindtoseeit."

Hermione took a moment to process the last bit and stopped. She turned Harry to face her, "uh-oh," the thought, "I've seen that look before."

"YOU WHAT? ARE YOU CRAZY? LETTING HIM IN TO YOU MIND AFTER WHAT HE DID TO YOU?"

"Hermione, I had to trust him. He only viewed that memory and left and he was very subtle the whole time. It wasn't like before. I think my mom's letter softened him up and when he saw the memory he started to believe me. I think that's why he gave the oath so easily – he wants to learn more."

"But Harry, you had no one there to help you. I could have lost you!" she hugged him with tears in her eyes.

He hugged her back, "I had to see if we could trust him. You would not have lost me that easily. Besides, I had to test the trust before I had him in the same room as you."

"OK, just promise me that you'll talk to me before you ever try a stunt like that again."

"I promise," he said and she kissed him.

They held hands again and walked for a little while in silence enjoying each other's company. Hermione started telling Harry about her night. "I finished the book this morning. There's a ton of information that's been changed for the current editions. Whoever did it really wanted people at each other's throats."

"We know who was behind it Hermione. Dumbledore may not have been the actual person who did it, but you can bet that he masterminded the whole thing."

"I know. It's just so much to take in. Oh, and Harry?"

"Yes?"

"My dad invited you for dinner on Saturday."

Harry froze, "Your father knows about us?"

"Well yeah. I told my mom about us last night – she had pretty much figured out it like everyone else has – and I told my father this morning after I told him about my inheritance."

Harry still hadn't moved, "I have to meet your parents?"

"Harry, you've met them before, remember?"

"I wasn't dating you at the time!"

"Are you nervous?"

"Nervous, no. Scared shitless, yes!"

Hermione enveloped Harry into a big hug. "Harry, you've faced Voldemort several times, fought a Basilisk, defeated a dragon and defeated several senior Death Eaters and you are scared of my dad? Don't worry, my mom likes the idea of us as a couple and she'll keep him in line."

Harry felt the warmth of her hug and the feeling of them together made him relax a bit, "Alright, I'll be there. I'll just have Griphook make sure my will is up to date."

She stepped back and took his hand again, "Thanks, love."

They continued walking, enjoying the morning and trading ideas back and forth. They had come to the conclusion that the best way to approach Her was directly and they decided to go after lunch.

As they walked they came up to one of the guesthouses. It looked like a little cottage nestled next to a pond. "Harry this is so beautiful. I can see why your family made this decision. You can have guests stay for longer periods of time and yet everyone has their independence and privacy. My parents have always talked about having a place like this when they retire."

Harry suddenly got an idea. "Hermione, why don't you bring your parents here on Saturday? Before you interrupt, please hear me out." She stopped what she was going to say and nodded.

"In two weeks what happened yesterday will start to get out into the wizarding world. It's only a matter of time before our relationship becomes common knowledge too. Once our enemies figure out what we are up to, we will become bigger targets than we are today and that will extend to friends and families. I'd like to grant your parents access to the estate and offer this cottage to your family as a refuge if you require it. I can get Jeeves to make up some emergency-use portkeys to bring you to this cottage if you are in danger."

"Hermione, launched herself at Harry and kissed him deeply, "There's another reason I love you. Thanks Harry. I'll tell my parents tonight when I get home."

"OK, I'll have the portkeys ready then too."

Shortly after that, Jeeves arrived and announced lunch was ready. He took them back to the manor where they enjoyed a quiet lunch between the two of them.

After lunch, Harry added Dan Granger, Jean Granger and Her name to the manor book. Hermione grasped Harry's shoulder and with a touch of his ring, they were gone.

/Scene Break/

They appeared in a large field bathed in sunlight. They started to walk together towards the house when they heard someone behind them.

"Oh, hello you two, I hadn't expected you this soon. Harry, I found that I seemed to have knowledge of a certain Manor house a little while ago so I figured I should head back home. I have news for you two. You may not like it though."

Harry smiled and shook his head, "You never cease to surprise me Luna. Does that mean you know what the results would be if you cast the Ostendo Meus Prosapia spell?"

She nodded. "My mother showed me before she died. Not even my father knows."

"Do you think you could come back to the Manor with us? We have some things to show you."

"Sure, let me go tell my dad." She skipped away to the house and went inside.

Hermione looked at Harry. "How could she know these things?"

"Hermione, Luna is brilliant but she wants to keep people off guard. That's why she has the whole 'Loony' persona. I'm not sure how much of that we will see anymore though."

By this time Luna had returned and with a "Take me home" from Harry, they disappeared from the field.

/Scene Break/

The three friends arrived back at the manor and went directly to the sitting room.

Harry had just retrieved the letters and papers when a very agitated elf appeared.

“Master, professor Dumbledore has just arrived on Privet drive. You must go back NOW!”

Harry looked at the girls and touched his ring and was immediately transported to his room. He quickly sat down at the desk and started reading the first book he saw.

He heard someone coming up the stairs and glanced at his rings. “Oh shit. I wish I could make them disappear.” To his amazement the rings faded from sight. He could still feel them, but they were invisible.

Just then the door burst open and Dumbledore and Remus came through.

Harry looked startled, “Professor? Moony? What are you doing here?”

Remus visibly relaxed and winked at Harry from behind the headmaster. Albus still looked tense.

“Harry, there was a disturbance near the Burrow today. Ginevra was coming to talk to Luna when she claims she saw you in a field not far from Luna’s home. Before she could get close enough the person she thought was you apparently apparated away with two others. She could not discern who they were.”

“Well professor. I’m right here. I don’t know how to apparate and I’m pretty sure that you mentioned to me once that the wards around this house prevent people from apparating to or from the property. This disturbs me though. They could have been Death Eaters. Has anyone checked on Luna?”

“Luna’s father told us that Luna went off to a friend’s house for the day. He will let us know when she comes back. She is due back after dinner. Unfortunately he could not remember the friend’s name.”

“So who do you think they were?”

“I’m not sure. They may have been Death Eaters under a glamour charm to look like you.”

“Or even polyjuice.”

“Yes, it could have been polyjuice.”

“This is weird. It feels funny knowing there are people going around looking like me. It’s kind of creepy.” He looked up at the headmaster with a nervous and scared look, “do you think you’ll be able to find them? I wouldn’t want someone looking like me getting at the Weasleys or any other of my friends. Maybe I can help?”

“Harry, I will have to Order look into this. It is far too dangerous for you to leave this house. Don’t worry; we will deal with this new issue. If you will excuse me, I will leave you to your studies. Remus, I think we should be going.”

The headmaster turned and headed out. Remus hesitated for a moment and smiled at Harry who returned a wink. Remus hurried to catch up with the Headmaster.

“What do you make of this professor?”

“I’m not sure Remus. The alarms I have on the wards would have alerted me to portkeys and apparition. And none of the guards saw Harry leave. Even if he had left, the Ministry would have been alerted if he tried to apparate. This is very curious.”

“What was Ginny really doing there?”

“She had thought she spotted Luna outside the Burrow. Xenophilius assured us she left for her friend’s house early in the morning. This is very curious indeed.”

Both men passed the edge of the wards and apparated away.

Harry allowed himself to release a long breath. He was so glad that he had Jeeves arrange for a Potter elf to be in the house while he was out.

Now that he was out of danger he summoned the elf back and thanked him.

Harry willed his rings to become visible again and went back to the Manor.

/Scene Break/

When he got back to the Manor he heard Hermione and Luna talking in the sitting room. Hermione wrapped her arms around him when he came in. "I was so worried. How did it go?"

Before he could answer he heard a small "It's about time."

Both of them looked at Luna, "Not you too?"

"Me, there's been a raffle on at school since the end of your third year about when you two would get together. Crap, I had the first week of August this year too. Well someone is about 75 Galleons richer."

Harry looked at Hermione, "are we the only ones who didn't see it?"

Luna continued, "In fact only Ron and Ginny bet that you would never get together."

Harry grimaced at the thought.

Hermione looked at him again, "So what happened?"

Harry told them both about Dumbledore's visit and that Ginny had seen them but only recognized him. He also told Luna that her father had covered for them.

“Daddy never got along with Dumbledore. In fact he’s warned me about the headmaster before.”

“So what did you two do while I was gone?”

Hermione said, “I tried to get Luna to read the papers but you had not yet given her permission to read them”

“But I did get some ideas about Neville’s and my relationship. I told Hermione, he asked me over to meet his Gran.”

Harry grinned, “That’s great Luna.” He was happy for her and Neville, but he wasn’t sure that the boy knew quite what he was getting into.

“Thanks. I did read the letter from your mother. She was a very smart witch herself. I suppose you’ve contacted Him? How will we be safe?”

“Yes, we met last night. He will be coming here tomorrow evening so the four of us can meet. As for safety, he and I have already taken oaths. I will need the same oaths from you.” He told them the oaths given last night.

Hermione and Luna raised their wands and said together, “I swear on my magic that I will not actively cause harm nor seek to cause harm to any of the other three people at the meeting should it come to pass.” They were bathed in the golden glow that he saw last night.

“Thanks. Tomorrow morning I will send him a message and add him to the allowed visitors list. I hereby give Luna Lovegood permission to read the papers given to me by Sirius Black. Now you should be able to the real words. But before you get into that, what was the news you had for us?”

“Well, Ron and Ginny have been acting strange towards us since the battle at the DoM. After Neville’s comments on the train, I thought I would keep an eye on the Burrow to see if I could get any clues. Ginny and I have been friends for years and I would not be out of place there. “

“Well, I was going to go see Ginny today and when I got close by I saw Ginny, Ron and Molly talking to Dumbledore out behind the Burrow. I got as close as I could and used one of those extendable ears. I’m sorry to say this to you two, but it looks like there will be a plot when we get back to Hogwarts to separate you too. The plan is for Ron to date Hermione and Ginny to date Harry. That way if Harry dies when he fights Voldemort, three Weasleys and Albus will divide the estate. Harry if you do defeat Voldemort and live, Albus will discredit you and have you thrown in Azkaban as a powerful dark wizard.”

Harry and Hermione shook their heads sadly. “Hermione, we’ll have to be on guard for love potions. Luna, read the rest of the papers. It will start to make more sense.”

The afternoon wore on as the three discussed the ancient prophecy and the situation they found themselves in. Hopefully He would decide to join them after the meeting tomorrow. They were saving the pensieve memories so that the four of them could experience them together. It would be an interesting evening.

Harry invited them both to spend the night tomorrow and instructed the elves to prepare the guest rooms in the Manor.

The three ate dinner together and then Harry took Luna home first (appearing about a kilometer away from her house), and then returned to the Manor. He and Hermione spent another hour together cuddling and kissing until Harry took her home as well.

He then went back to the Manor and then returned to Privet drive for the evening. He turned in early – tomorrow would be an important day.

A/N – Wow this turned out to be the longest chapter so far. I’ll start work on the next chapter since that one will answer a lot of the questions. But I’m out of town all week so I’m not sure how much time I’ll get to write. It will be out before the weekend though. In the meantime I hope you enjoyed this chapter and that Luna is the mysterious She.

Chapter 8 – Lo and Behold It's HIM

Wednesday morning found turned out to be a very busy one for a number of people.

Remus Lupin was up early preparing himself for his monthly transformation. Usually he dreaded these days but this month his “furry little problem” was more of an annoyance than anything else. He very much wanted to get started helping Harry with sorting through the Black Family artifacts. Remus planned to have that particular task finished before the fourteenth so that Harry could decide their fate before anyone else knew. Once the will was publicly read it could be contested. As far as the goblins were concerned, the official will reading was complete since any beneficiary who would have received anything of value was at the first one.

Remus knew that there were many influential purebloods that will strongly object to the disposition of the assets and use their formidable monetary influence to object. Dumbledore as well had his own agenda to keep Harry on a leash. No, it was best if Harry dealt with everything Black before the fourteenth. As accepted head of the Black family it was within his rights to do what he wanted with the artifacts.

Remus sighed; he just had to get past tonight.

/Scene Break/

Albus Dumbledore was still deep in thought about the events of yesterday. Something was not right about the boy. The little brat had always been a complete puzzle to him. He had set him up in an abusive household where he would be isolated and shunned by his family and the society he grew up in. Anyone who took notice in the boy would be scared off or obliterated.

He had even managed to get Sirius Black out of the way, shamed Remus Lupin to stay away and manipulated the Potter will so that it was under lock and key until the boy became an adult. He chuckled. If his plans came to fruition, Harry would never see his seventeenth

birthday and the Great Albus Dumbledore will have defeated Lord Voldemort after the “Dark Lord” killed “the boy who lived”.

The problem was that the boy wasn't following the program. Yes, he was withdrawn and made a friend of the Weasley boy on schedule, but who thought that anyone with his upbringing could end up caring so much for others.

He should have seen it coming that Halloween with the troll. Saving Granger and becoming friends with her upset the balance he had been hoping to achieve. With each year, Granger had been by his side and they worked well as a team. Not even Weasley could split them up. With this stronger relationship both Harry and Hermione had become too defiant. This would not do. He had already enlisted the youngest Weasleys and Molly. By keeping Potter and Granger apart for the whole summer there would be an opening for Ron and Ginevra to move in.

Sirius was another problem with the plan. His appearance also gave the boy more backbone and confidence. With Sirius out of the way now, the grief would help weaken the boy's resolve over the summer.

He was actually surprised by Harry's note a few days ago. The grief and self-loathing that the boy was prone to must be doing their thing. With Harry not at the will reading and his authorization for Dumbledore to act on his behalf there was a chance to strengthen his plan. Albus suspected that Sirius had left Harry the bulk of the Black Estate, however the title of Lord Black was hereditary and the next in line would be Draco Malfoy. Dumbledore's plan was to slip a marriage contract to Ginny Weasley into the inheritance and gain even more control.

Yes, this plan was starting to go all pear-shaped over the past year, but fate (and a well-placed stunner) had given Albus a chance to set everything right.

The only loose end was the question of just who was in that field yesterday.

/Scene Break/

Hermione woke up to a brand new day with excitement and trepidation. Tonight the four of them would have their first meeting. She was very nervous about the fourth member of their group. How was he going to react? Would they even meet again after tonight? The prophecy said they had to work together. But how would that be possible with all the history behind them?

She then remembered last night with Harry. He was such a kind and gentle wizard and she could not think of anyone better – even though he was so clueless sometimes. For instance that question he asked yesterday.

/Flashback/

“Hermione can I ask you a question?”

“You just did.” Hermione was in a silly mood.

Harry sighed, “OK can I ask you a question after this one?”

“Yes, you may.”

“Why me?”

“You’re kidding right?”

“No. Why choose me? You are beautiful, intelligent, and independent. Any boy would be lucky and honoured to have you as his girlfriend. And yet you choose the socially inept, maladjusted recluse who attracts so many psychopaths that both his government and The Dark Lord and his herd of degenerates have tried to kill him.”

“Harry, you forgot that you are smart, resourceful and gentle with those you love while at the same time you will defend those people with your life. Not to mention your heavenly eyes and Quidditch-sculpted physique that have half the female population of Hogwarts swooning.”

“But I’m just so afraid I’ll muck this up. You are so important to me and I feel like the luckiest wizard alive!”

“Just keep remembering that Mr. Potter and you won’t mess this up. I feel like the luckiest witch alive.”

They hugged each other and ended up in a very passionate kiss.

/End Flashback/

Hermione bounced out of bed. She was going to meet Harry and Luna for breakfast in this morning.

Harry had given her and Luna necklaces that Jeeves had made into portkeys like Harry’s ring. They would take them from anywhere to the manor and back. She was looking forward to trying it this morning.

She first had to talk to her parents. She got ready for the morning and once she was dressed she went downstairs. Dan and Jean were sitting in the Kitchen with their coffee.

“Good Morning mom and dad.” Hermione bounded into the kitchen and poured herself a glass of juice.

“Morning honey,” said Dan, “Did you invite Harry over Saturday?”

“Actually dad, Harry has invited us over. He wants to show you his Manor.”

Jane asked, “Mione, why do I know about this manor? Yesterday the idea of it just came into my head.”

“Mine too,” piped Dan.

“Well the place is protected by very ancient magic. Only those people granted access to it have any knowledge of it. If access is revoked they forget it ever existed and any memories they ever had of being there. This leads me to these,” she held out two rings, “These can take you to the manor if you are in danger. You just have to touch them and say ‘Take me to Potter Manor’ and you will be there. The

manor has five guest cottages on the grounds and Harry insisted you have a safe place to stay should you need it. The conflict in the wizarding world is starting to heat up and we are not sure at this moment who we can trust. So if you see any magical people other than me, Harry or anyone who we say is trustworthy approaching, please use the rings. As of right now, there is no one else you know on that trusted list. This includes all the staff from Hogwarts or anyone from the Ministry of Magic for now.”

“Hermione, we don’t want you to be in danger. Is there anything we can do?”

“No, this is something I am destined to be a part of. I can’t escape my destiny. I just want you to be safe.”

“Hermione, we are glad that you trusted us enough to tell us the truth. You have grown into a strong, independent and beautiful woman. Harry is very lucky to have your love.”

“I know. And what’s better is that he knows. He even wondered yesterday why I chose him?”

Jane smiled, “If he keeps that up, he sounds like a keeper.”

Dan realized what they were talking about and had the smile that unnerved Hermione yesterday, “Tell Harry we’ll see him on Saturday and thank him for thinking of our safety.”

“I will Daddy.”

/Scene Break/

Harry woke up in his lumpy bed at Privet Drive. “Man I am not going to miss this place.” He made a point of getting dressed moved around the house making sure he was seen. “God the Order must be pretty bad guards if this is fooling them,” he smiled to himself.

He thought of the past couple days and realized that his happiness with him and Hermione as a couple was allowing him to see the rest of his life with a sense of optimism that he had never had before.

Hermione represented a present and a future worth living for and that was something he had never had in his life.

Hermione and Luna were coming by at 9:30 for breakfast. He traveled to the Manor and finished the last remaining pieces for tonight. First, he added His name to the book. He then sent another patronus messenger to give Him the time to arrive. It was now 8am. Harry had one more thing to do.

Hermione's parents were coming on Saturday. He went to Gringotts to update his will.

/Scene Break/

Ron woke up staring at his ceiling. How had this gone so wrong? He had befriended Harry like his mother and the headmaster had told him. But then Granger got in the way. He followed the revised plans in order to get in between her and Harry by trying to get her to notice him and go out with him instead. The new plan Dumbledore came up with had to work. He was tired of living in poverty.

/Scene Break/

Ginny got up early that morning determined to find out what happened yesterday. She was sure Harry was up to something and Loony was part of it. She was also pretty sure the Loony was spying on them. She had to find out. She muttered, "Nothing and I mean nothing is going to mess up our plans. Potter is mine until he dies."

She headed out determined to keep an eye on Luna today. Once she got in view of the Lovegood house she found a secluded spot and kept watch.

/Scene Break/

Luna woke up like every other day full of happiness at the wonder of being alive. She looked out the window and could not help seeing the red hair of the girl watching her house. She chuckled. Ginny didn't make sure she was hidden from the third floor.

She got ready to leave and checked to make sure she had time. She had about an hour before she had to be at Harry's. She might as well have fun.

Bidding her father goodbye, she confirmed with him that she would be back sometime tomorrow. She grabbed her knapsack and ran out the front door yelling about Nargles and Crumple-horned Snorlacks. Ginny went running after her. Luna kept her going for over almost an hour. She slipped into the woods and yelled, "Found it!" and activated the portkey. Seconds later, a thoroughly exhausted Ginny ran into the woods. How was she going to find Luna in this dense forest?

/Scene Break/

The same morning found a figure asleep in his bed. The light started to shine though the window but was quickly banished by grumbling and a spell to cover the window. As he rolled over a silvery light filled the room and he grudgingly opened his eyes again to see a large stag in front of him. He got the message and the stag shimmered out of existence.

"Interesting," he thought, "I now know where Potter Manor is. Potter has not yet lied to me. Perhaps there is more than just a shred of truth to his story." He rolled over again and tried to go back to sleep. He was definitely not a morning person.

/Scene Break/

Hermione, Harry and Luna were still in stitches after breakfast. Luna's description of her running Ginny ragged for almost an hour. "She's probably still there," she said snickering.

"Luna, you are so ..." Hermione burst into fits of laughter again.

"It serves her right. She was such a poor spy to begin with. Following me was her choice."

The three of them finally calmed down and started to prepare for that evening.

“OK,” Harry started, “if He’s going to come he will be here at 8pm.”

“What are we going to do if he doesn’t come?” asked Hermione, “I mean, without him the prophecy is useless. How do we even know that the prophecy was meant for now and not another 100 years from now?”

“He’ll be here,” stated Harry, “I saw it in his eyes the other night. If he wasn’t coming he would not have given the oath.”

“I agree with Harry,” said Luna, “this is the right time for the prophecy. I fear if it isn’t now, there won’t be another chance.”

Hermione nodded, “You guys are right. I guess I’m just a bit nervous in anticipation of tonight.”

Harry put his arm around her, “We’re all a bit nervous Hermione. I just keep thinking back to my meeting the other night though. I think it struck a chord with him. It’s kind of like when I first read what Sirius sent me and everything in my life started falling into place.”

For the next hour they discussed the meeting and came up with an outline of an agenda for how they thought the meeting should flow. It being a nice day, they decided to go for a walk through the woods. They followed a different path than yesterday.

A short time into their walk, Hedwig swooped down and held out her leg to Harry. Harry took the letter and said, “Hello girl. Are the elves treating you properly?”

Hedwig hooted in what seemed to be a contented manner.

Harry stroked her feathers, “Thanks Hedwig. Why don’t you go back to the owlry and get your beauty sleep?”

Hedwig playfully cuffed him on the back of the head with her wing and launched into the air again.

Harry looked at the letter, “It’s from Neville.”

Dear Harry,

Something has happened and I wanted to warn you about it. The day after we returned from Hogwarts, Dumbledore showed up here and had a talk with Gran. Gran initially asked me to stay, but Dumbledore said that the two of them needed to talk in private. They talked for about an hour before he came out of the room with that obnoxious twinkle in his eye and said goodbye to me and left.

I went into the study and Gran asked me to sit down. She said the Headmaster is concerned with the company I'm keeping. He wants me to distance yourself from your, Hermione and Luna. In his opinion the you and Hermione are a bad influence on anyone who gets close to them and it seems that Luna's Dad already refused the Headmaster's similar request last week.

I wanted to interrupt, but Gran asked me to let her finish before I said anything. She continued on that Dumbledore suggested that I get closer to Ron and Ginny since they were being prepared over the summer to "deal with the situation." She told him that she would speak to me about the situation and get me to make the right choice. After talking a bit more about the situation he thanked her and left.

I was livid at that point and started to defend my closest friends. She stopped me in my tracks and told me to listen. She said, "I don't know everything that went on in that school this year, but obviously your involvement with these three students has changed you. I have never been more proud of the man you are becoming. The headmaster is up to something and I'll be damned if I counsel my grandson to stand against the people responsible for helping him realize his potential. The Longbottom and Potter families have stood side by side for nearly a millennium. There is nothing that Albus Dumbledore can say that will change this. If Albus sees your friends as a threat then they must have a very good reason to distrust the Headmaster."

I'm telling you Harry, I had never felt as close to my Gran as I did at that moment. We spend the rest of the morning talking and I told her about Umbridge and the DA.

I hope you are safe. If you can arrange it somehow, Gran would like to meet you but we know that Dumbledore will be trying to cage you up this summer. If you can make it, please send us an owl.

Oh, speaking of Luna, what do you think of me asking her out? Do you think I have a chance?

Your friend,

Neville

P.S. I wasn't sure how I was going to get this letter through to you and then Hedwig appeared at my Window. She is one smart owl.

Harry smiled, put the letter down and looked at the girls. Hermione was grinning. Luna was absolutely beaming. She whispered, "Of course Neville."

The three of them agreed that Harry should wait until after the meeting and write Neville back tomorrow inviting Him and his Gran over for dinner on Saturday with the Grangers. Luna would invite her dad as well. Harry also told them that he would make emergency portkeys for Neville and his Gran and Luna's father.

The three of them decided to relax after lunch and save up as much energy as they could for the meeting that night. Harry had the elves prepare two bedrooms in the Manor for the girls and had them prepare one more in case their guest decided to stay the evening.

At 7:00 they ate a light dinner. The three of them were beginning to feel their nerves. The elves had prepared the study for the evening and then at Harry's request had made themselves scarce.

As the time wound down, they sat in silence since none of them could think of anything to ease the tension. At the top of the hour they heard a soft pop from the entranceway and a dark figure with a billowing cape appeared at the doorway.

"Hello Tom, you're right on time. Won't you please come and join us?"

A/N – Now you know who He is. The next chapter will explain why. I know many of you were convinced it was Snape. I kind of wrote it that way very carefully. Before any of you cry foul, the next chapter will explain. Stay tuned for Chapter 9 – Riddle Me This Riddle Me That

Chapter 9 – Riddle Me This Riddle Me That

/Flashback/

Lord Voldemort was resting in his private study. “I haven’t been able to shake this headache since that damn Potter brat threw me out of his head,” he muttered to himself.

He had spent most of the past few weeks in seclusion keeping his own council – not that he had much of a choice though. Those pureblood sycophants who surrounded him had never done anything but agree with him. Maybe the Crucio curses he threw whenever they disagreed had something to do with it, but he only punished them because most of their ideas were downright stupid. Oh well, what could he expect from a group of historically inbred purebloods.

The only one who managed to sway his opinion at times with well-thought arguments was Severus. But then again, he was a half-blood who had a gift for being able to see the long-term consequences of any action. Too bad he was also Dumbledore’s man.

The light in the room changed and Voldemort stood face to face with a silvery glowing stag.

“Tom, its Harry Potter. Let me ask you a few questions:”

“Did you ever wonder why your Death Eaters prefer to throw stunners at purebloods and more dangerous and deadly ones at half-bloods and muggle born?”

“How come Albus Dumbledore and his feathered friends and the Ministry Aurors don’t use anything more than stunners and non-lethal curses even faced with killing curses coming back at them?”

“All Death Eaters get trials. Others are thrown in Azkaban without trial or due process. Ever wonder why?”

“Azkaban is supposed to be a secure prison. Tell me then why soon after you came back the it has become no more than a weekend

getaway for Death Eaters the Ministry manage to capture when the other prisoners are locked securely away?"

And finally on a more personal note to you, ever wonder why when you were four years old everyone at the orphanage started hating you?"

"I know the answers to some of these questions. Tom, if you wish to discuss, I will be contacting you tonight. We've both been deceived by the old coot Tom."

The patronus dissolved away. Tom was stunned. He had assumed the answer to most of those questions was that it was because he was Lord Voldemort. However as he thought about it, that fact did not explain the actions and inactions of the 'side of the light'. And how the hell did he know about the orphanage and when they started hating him.

"Potter knows something," he thought, "and he didn't seem confrontational. Very well, I will give him an audience tonight. I can always torture him later."

He didn't have much time to reflect on Potter's words when he felt a familiar stirring in his brain. A familiar voice sounded inside his head, "Tom, I'm here." Tom closed his eyes and fell into a meditative state.

He was in a hallway leading into a sparsely finished room. There was old table with four chairs lit by two very strange candles.

"Potter. Why have you summoned me here? I don't have time for your games."

"But yet you came. You know why you came. I know why you came. You came for answers to the questions I posed to you. You are just as curious as I am about the reason why many of the things that happen around us happen the way they do. You want to know why your life has been manipulated and why you continue to be manipulated to this day. I have some of the answers with me but I these answers I will share will only lead to more questions for now." He handed Voldemort a letter. "You remember my mother Lily? Of

course you do. She and my godfather dug up some information working as Unspeakables. This just scratches the surface.”

Tom read the letter. In it Lily highlighted things that her and Sirius had found and every sentence confused him further. Much of this was their interpretation of events and records they found throughout the Ministry. Any one piece of information was innocent, however once put together, the story slowly revealed itself.

‘The Pureblood Conspiracy’ was what they called it. For generations the Dumbledore family and their cadre of some of the most influential pureblood families had set the stage for this takeover of the Wizarding world. Albus had been raised to bring this to its conclusion. He masterfully manipulated both the dark and the light sides in a chess game of deception. The families Malfoy, Black, Fudge, McGonagall, Sprout, Prewitt, Sinistra, Slughorn, Rookwood, and Lestrange were instrumental throughout the years. Family members would be let into the secret once they had proven trustworthy. This oaths and rituals used to guard this information were the reason that family members who married outside of the family would never know or be able to reveal what the other side of the family knew and many times these people were officially disowned as well. The Potters, Longbottoms, Weasley and Bones families were never trusted. For a different reason the Gaunts were never trusted once it became clear that they were too unstable.

The Dumbledores had followed the Gaunts for a very long time and Albus saw the opportunity with Tom. As a half-blood he would make an excellent figurehead for the ‘Dark’ and was completely expendable. The Malfoy and Black families would enlist others and act as the ‘Dark’. They would also recruit undesirable magical creatures like giants, werewolves and vampires as the expendable forces.

Dumbledore manipulated his way into the Supreme Mugwump position and became the leader of the ‘light’. The light side consisted of some of the core families, and it was seen as a way to weaken and perhaps eliminate the Potter, Longbottom, Weasley and Bones lines. Albus also rounded out the forces with half-blood muggle-born members who were expendable.

All of this was calculated to swing the majority of the magical population to accept new regulations and a society where the rigid class structure and its hierarchy of rights would willingly be accepted into law. Regulations were introduced to register and track the non-human magical creatures (purebloods did not consider werewolves as human anymore) and these passed with ease. Eventually the pureblood Death Eaters would have a change of heart and turn on Tom. Once he was dead, they would use the aftermath to push through the final legislation to establish a firm class structure with associated rights with purebloods at the top, controlling the monetary, governmental and legislative facets of wizarding life as guardians against the non-pure threat.

He read the section with the prophecy, "So this is why Potter came to me," he thought. This was all so confusing and Tom did not like to be confused.

Once he was finished, he looked directly at Harry, "If this is true..."

"It is and, yes, I know what you are thinking about our glorious Headmaster right now. I have one other item I have brought with me here. It is a memory I viewed in a pensieve." He smirked, "If I remember correctly, you dabble in legilimency. After having read what you have and seeing your expression, I am inviting you into my mind to see this memory and this one only. If we are going to work together, we have to get over our past differences and try and trust each other. This is the first test."

Tom looked into his eyes (which wasn't actually necessary since they were each other's minds already but it helped maintain the illusion of the room they were meeting in) and the memory bubbled to the surface. This was a strange sensation – looking at the memory of a memory.

A young boy was sneaking through the halls of what Tom remembered as the initial hell he lived in. He recognized the boy as David one of his so-called best friends. The boy had come upon an open door. He looked in and quickly pulled back before he was spotted. Mrs. Gaines, the woman who ran the orphanage was talking to a bearded man in a smart business suit.

Ton thought. "He cleaned up well. What the hell was he doing here though? I was only four."

He overheard the conversation between the two.

"Madam, I am here about a charge of yours named Tom Riddle."

"Oh yes, Tom is such a lovely boy. He is intelligent, witty and very likeable. He doesn't have too many friends but he is fiercely loyal. He's usually got a smile on his face and loves playing with his friends."

A wand appeared in Dumbledore's hand and David heard the word "Obliviate."

"Madam, you will think of Tom Riddle as the most vicious boy ever to come into your care. You will ensure that he is isolated from any friends and that the older charges enforce this isolation. He is to be physically and psychologically abused."

With that Albus turned and left. David barely had time to duck into the shadows as Albus left.

Tom emerged from the memory. Now thoroughly confused. He felt the feelings of betrayal and confusion as his life changed at four years old to the worse. He felt the anger that started to develop in him in the later years when he could fight back. He now knew this was what Albus wanted. By continuing down the path he was on he was playing into the old coot's hands. Could he change? Could this boy in front of him be the key?

"What's the next step Potter?"

The four of us will meet in a safe location Wednesday evening at 8pm. There will only be the four of us plus my house elves.

"Where is this place?"

"If I told you about it now you would not understand or even hear me. It is an unplotable location and I control access. Wednesday I will grant you access and will send you another message via patronus to verify. You will be forced to come alone. Only those with explicit permission can get anywhere near the location. If I remove your access you will forget about the place once more. Dumbledore already doesn't know he used to have access."

"How can I trust you?"

"I think based on our history a better question is how can I trust you? I've already thought of that – watch." Harry raised his wand, "I hereby swear on my magic that there will only be the four people involved and my elf staff at the meeting on Wednesday night should it come to pass. I also swear on my magic that I will not actively cause harm nor seek to cause harm to any of the other three people at the meeting should it come to pass." Harry was surrounded by a glow as the oath took effect. He smirked, "your turn. I will also make sure the other two say the oath before the meeting."

"There will be no others present?"

"The only other person who has permission won't be there. Wednesday is the full moon and you may remember his furry little problem."

Ah, the werewolf Remus Lupin. He was the last of his parents' true friends alive.

Tom thought it over and raised his wand; "I swear on my magic that I will not actively cause harm nor seek to cause harm to any of the other three people at the meeting should it come to pass." He was bathed in a golden glow as his oath took effect.

"You must really be starting to believe this. That oath was a bit too freely given."

"Potter, I have to admit you have given me something to think about. I await your message on Wednesday. Until then I have things to think about."

With that, he left the room and opened his eyes back in his study.

/End Flashback/

Tom entered the room and sat at the table.

Harry said, "Tom, I would like you to meet Hermione Granger and Luna Lovegood. We are the prophesied four."

"Are you sure?" Tom asked.

"You are familiar with the Ostendo Meus Prosapia spell?" Tom nodded and Harry continued, "Well it's time we revealed to each other who we are."

In Unison they cast the family-revealing spell. Family trees appeared in front of all four of them. They all scrolled up to the appropriate entry.

Harry stated, "I am the last of the Gryffindor line and thus Lord Gryffindor."

Tom followed, "I am the last of the Slytherin line and thus Lord Slytherin."

Hermione spoke, "I am the last of the Ravenclaw line and thus Lady Ravenclaw."

Luna was the final one; "I am the last of the Hufflepuff line and thus Lady Hufflepuff."

Tom said, "Ladies, you are the biggest surprise. It has been common knowledge that the Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw lines disappeared over 700 years ago"

Luna spoke up, "My mother was the first in 700 years to know she was a Hufflepuff heir. She researched it and found the magic went dormant in the line until it was needed again and the family appeared to be nothing but Muggle. I suspect that is the same story as Hermione."

Hermione said, "That explains part of what I'm wondering, but why were you two sorted into the houses you are heirs of but Luna and I weren't."

Harry answered, "I wondered about that myself."

Luna spoke up, "My mother was sorted into Ravenclaw. She suspected that if the heir of a house becomes part of it, the signs would be quite noticeable of their status. She thought the hat tried to put the heirs in different houses for their protection. The same thing happened to me and I told the hat I would be happy wherever it put me."

Tom added, "In my case, the hat wanted to put me in Hufflepuff. But I convinced it otherwise."

Harry said, "The hat wanted me in Slytherin but I insisted Gryffindor."

Hermione admitted, "I was surprised with Gryffindor, I had always assumed I'd be in Ravenclaw."

Harry said, "Now that we have that settled, we should decide what to do about the prophecy." He unfurled one of the pages he got from Sirius and quickly added, "Oh yes, Tom Riddle can read the documents provided to me by Sirius."

Tom looked at him strangely. Harry shrugged, "they were charmed and I'd rather you didn't try to read them." Hermione and Luna visibly shuddered.

A time of turmoil will befall the world and those considered of pure blood will hasten its destruction. Only the four can change the outcome. They must once again unite under a common banner and awaken the powers of the Lady.

The sat in contemplative silence for a few minutes Tom spoke, "It seems like we have to vow to work together. I fear I may be to far gone though."

Hermione spoke, "Tom, we know about the horcruxes."

Tom was shocked, "I had told no one."

Harry spoke, "My mother got a memory out of a professor Slughorn. It detailed your question about one versus seven. What it also had was a discussion between Slughorn and Dumbledore where Albus was happy that Horace had passed on the information he told him to. Apparently Dumbledore made sure you found the information about them in the first place."

Hermione asked, "How many did you end up making? I mean we know about the diary, but where are the others?"

"Oh, I ended up making seven. I was going to try for thirteen, but when I tried to make my eighth, the curse rebounded off Harry's forehead and I never was able to perform the ritual. As for where they are, I knew when I "misplaced" the diary many years ago I thought someone may have stolen it. Now I'm sure it was Malfoy and that Dumbledore was aware. So anyway, as I created the others I found silly locations that I had history with and used various special spells and curses to protect cleverly fashioned decoys."

"Decoys?" asked Harry.

"Yes, remember I grew up in the muggle world too. I know about the stereotypical evil genius that figures out uselessly complicated ways of hiding his secrets. Knowing how wizards think, I hid decoys at these locations. No, the real horcruxes are in a numbered safety deposit box in Geneva. All six are there. No wizard would ever consider a muggle hiding place." He smirked.

Hermione and Luna started giggling and Harry could not help but help but laugh out loud. Even Tom chuckled a bit.

Hermione looked directly at Tom and said, "Tom, you have been abused and manipulated all your life to be who you are today. You have a choice, you can continue life as it is and walk out the door. Harry will remove your access to this Manor and you will forget this

place and this meeting. You will most likely be killed in the next 1-2 years and the wizarding world will begin to disintegrate.”

“Your alternative is to join us and use the power and influence of the last heirs of the four founders. We will need to find the spells and rituals needed to re-integrate your soul fragments back into yourself. My guess is that it will not be pleasant.”

Tom asked, “Before I answer, who is The Lady mentioned in the prophecy?”

Hermione smiled, “Why the Lady Hogwarts of course. The ancient wards and powers can only be reactivated by the joint request of the four founders. There is even evidence the castle is slightly sentient.”

Harry looked, “Hermione, where did you learn this?”

She pulled out the old book, “In this version of Hogwarts a History,” she looked at Tom and continued to explain, “Dumbledore has engaged in altering history. This is probably one of the few editions that was not destroyed or altered. For instance, did you know that Godric and Salazar were great friends? How about this one, Slytherin house accepted any wizards with the cunning personality – even muggle born. Dumbledore wrote the history of the pureblood-only, dark wizard training ground.”

She passed the book across the table. “Here, if you want you can read it. I’m done”.

Tom had a lot to think about, “ May I take some time to think about this overnight? This has been a lot of information to take in.”

Harry said, “I think I speak for the ladies when I say that we completely understand. If you wish, I have had the house elves prepare a room for you, or you could leave if you wish and maintain your access to the manor.’

Tom felt emotions he hadn’t since he was four. “Thank you Pot.. Harry, I think I will stay. I need to know one thing though.”

Hermione asked, "What is it?"

"You are all sitting here with me like we are allies and equals. We have never been either and yet you treat me that way. Why?"

Luna reached over and patted his hand, "Tom we have all seen what you have suffered at the hands of Dumbledore. You were controlled and manipulated until you had not enough soul or conscience to control your own actions. We know in order to begin to reverse this damage you will probably go through some of the toughest things you've ever had to. In order to follow through you will need a reason why. That reason is that we will from now on trust that you will make the right decision and help you get to the point where we can work as a team to make this world right again."

Tom looked at the three people at the table and knew they were all in agreement. I think I shall turn in now and read what this book has to say. With that he stood up with his robes impressively billowing in some unknown breeze.

Harry could not resist, "Tom, how do you do that with your robes? The only other person whose robes act like that is Snape."

Tom smirked, "I had always wondered how he did it and one day I asked. I just like the look. If you are good, I'll teach you three." With that, he added a bit to the billowing and left.

Harry, Luna and Hermione sat around the table.

Hermione voiced what the other two were thinking, "Well, this has certainly been one of the weirdest evenings in my life."

A/N – I don't know how many times I rewrote the prophecy. I'm still not sure I'm happy with it, but I needed to move on. I'd also like to have ideas of which character should end up on which side of the fence. For instance, which of the Weasley children will be more like Prewitts and which like Weasleys? Also what you think of the idea of the redemption of Tom Riddle?

Next update will come as soon as I can write it.

Chapter 10 – The Morning After the Night Before

Thursday morning found Harry leaving the Manor for Privet Drive around 6 am. He needed to make an appearance and hoped that no one noticed he wasn't there last night. He had been a little worried leaving Luna and Hermione alone in the house with Tom but something in his gut told him it would be all right. He planned to be back by 8am to have breakfast with them. His visit to Privet Drive was only to make an appearance, shower and leave.

/Scene Break/

Tom hadn't slept all night. That really didn't bother him. Sleep was only really necessary every three or four days when your soul was as fractured as his. However when he actually did sleep, it took forever to wake up and he needed a few litres of coffee to become fully alert.

Three words kept going through his mind – So many lies.

He had finished the book Hermione had given him. Hogwarts didn't have to be the way it was. Slytherin students got along with all others. There were special common rooms for every year to encourage school unity. The school used to run at full capacity – there were no unused hallways and only a handful of empty classrooms.

So many lies.

He thought of his 'loyal' Death Eaters – his inner circle. Why didn't he see their failures for what they were? It wasn't incompetence if they failed at carrying out a mission or killing a targeted pureblood. The truth was that they were following a different master all along.

So many lies.

He remembered wanting to try out for the Quidditch team in his second year. Dumbledore informed him that he needed a signed release from his guardian. Mrs. Gaines, of course, refused. He wanted to go to Hogsmeade with the other students, once again, no permission form, no Hogsmeade. Dumbledore said there was nothing he could do.

So many lies.

He remembered that fateful day. He had been receiving notes during his fifth year. One note told him where to find the faucet in the bathroom with the Serpent – “In there you will find your true purpose,” it said.

It was the Basilisk who confirmed he was Slytherin’s heir. It told him that it had been there for over 900 years. He went back and visited it often but there was no he could not let it out. One day towards the end of the school year during one of Dumbledore’s classes he had looked into the Professor’s eyes and suddenly got the thought “I could just let it out in the bathroom for a bit.”

The next day, he went to the chamber and allowed it to come out for a while. It turned out that a girl had been in there. Upon her death, he felt compelled to create a horcrux using the diary. It was like he was in a pensieve memory knowing what he was doing, but not being in control. Going through the painful process brought Lord Voldemort to the forefront and Tom Riddle began to disappear.

He got the Basilisk back in the Chamber and closed it. The Horcrux ritual left him in a daze for a few days. During this time he was left a note to go to a certain broom cupboard at a certain time. There he caught Hagrid and got his reward.

It only occurred to him briefly on the train ride back to London that the girl who had been killed, Myrtle, was the only one who tried to show him and friendship at school. She had been teased mercilessly at school and the two of them had formed a common bond of being outcasts.

The others who talked with him – some Slytherins from some of the oldest pureblood families – associated him because they said they felt his power. He knew now those purebloods were part of the overall plan. They were the ones assigned to play “the Dark side.”

So many lies.

Dumbledore insisted that he had to go back to the orphanage every summer – “Sorry Tom, no student can stay over the summer.” He didn’t even try to place him with any magical family who might want to provide him a room for two months. No he had to go back to where it all started back to the abuse. When he got older, he started to be the aggressor. He started to fight back and get revenge.

So many lies.

He thought back to his first years at the orphanage. Mrs. Gaines was always so nice and friendly. She always tucked the younger ones in at night and gave them each a hug. She was always there with hugs and words of encouragement. He didn’t have a large number of friends, but they loved to play. Hide and seek was his favourite. He could always find the best hiding places and he also enjoyed keen eyesight that helped to spot the others when he was seeking.

Then one day when he was four, his world collapsed. Mrs. Gaines stopped giving him hugs. She started telling him what a bad and evil boy he was. She let the older kids pick on him and he was punished at every turn. Even his friends were scared off by the older kids and after a while they just stopped trying and ignored him. He remembered being confused and hurt. He cried himself to sleep for over a year after that – first out loud and then silently after he was punished for keeping the rest of the kids in his room awake. And now he knew that it was all because of Dumbledore.

So many lies.

Tom looked into the mirror in his bathroom and for the first time saw himself not as the product of his brilliance but as the product of having a life determined and manipulated by others. He was still ultimately responsible for his actions and he did many of them willingly. However what he put off in his youth as coincidences and his subconscious guiding him was actually situations set up by Dumbledore and thoughts placed in his head by the professor using legilimency. He remembered the happy four year-old who once looked out at him from the mirror.

So many lies.

For the first time in many years, tears slowly ran down Tom Riddle's face. The pain was incredible. He had never doubted who he was and what he was doing to himself and others. The past 48 hours had changed that. What were really his decisions and what were the machinations of a master meddler? He began to feel regret and what he had done and what he had lost. The pain of the regret was excruciating. It was worse than the Cruciatus curse. The pain slowly ebbed as the regret turned to anger at those who had controlled his life.

He crawled back to the bed and slowly recovered from the pain. He realized something had changed. It was almost imperceptible, but he felt different. Something was affecting him.

As he lay there, he thought of the other three who had been at the meeting. They had accepted him as part of their group. They too had been victims or targets of the conspiracy. He understood why they needed to band together, as the last descendents of the four founders they could wield a lot of power if they worked together. Tom was sure that was the key. Alone, they would remain targets – together they could gather support of the magical community.

Tom knew now that he had to join them. But how? He had sunk so far down and traveled a path no one else had ever dared to do so. He wondered if he even would have had it not been for Albus.

He didn't know if he had the strength and will to do this alone. He would need help. The question was – would the three of them be willing and able to help him. He would ask them at breakfast.

/Scene Break/

Hermione woke think about that past month. So much had changed. If someone had told her that within a week of ending her fifth year at school she would be sleeping in the same house as Tom Riddle and wanting him as an ally she would have had that person checked into the long term spell damage ward at St. Mungo's. However that is exactly what was happening. Hermione knew that Tom would not be

able to wield his full magical power with a badly fractured soul. She would help him find out how to repair it.

The first place to start would be her vault at Gringotts. The Black family library was full of books on dark magic and rituals. "I think Sirius' words were giving me a hint, she thought. "Lily and him knew about the horcruxes, he could have been pointing me to the answer."

She would talk to the rest of them over breakfast. But first, she thought that the huge bathtub in her ensuite looked inviting and she had the time.

/Scene Break/

Luna awoke feeling better than she had since her mother died. She finally had two very good friends in Harry and Hermione and Neville wanted to ask her out. She had always thought that Neville was cute if a bit shy. The DA last year and the fight at the DoM had brought out the true Neville. All he needed was the confidence and their group had managed to inspire that in him.

Luna smiled about the meeting last night. Tom Riddle had started to show himself for the first time in many years. Lord Voldemort was a front – a personality created by Tom Riddle to deal with the path his life was being forced down.

Luna knew all about showing different faces. When her mother died suddenly in that spell creation disaster, Luna feared that someone had found out she was Hufflepuff's heir. Her mother had always cautioned her not to tell anyone until the other heirs appeared and that there were wizards and witches who didn't want the heirs to come back.

So, on her mother's death she adopted the 'Loony Lovegood' personality. She had always enjoyed learning about the fantastical creatures like Wrakspurts, Nargles and Crumple Horned Snorlacks. I mean just because you can't see something does not mean it's not real. Muggles believed dragons were creatures or fantasy but yet wizards knew they were real. The 'Loony' personality just brought it

up to the forefront. She actually liked 'Loony' – it was a persona that made sure that she didn't have to try and get along with people.

Ginny was the first one to try to get through. She was being friendly and all, but still kept a certain distance. Harry was the first person to accept what she was talking about and treat her as normal. It was through him that she met the rest of her friends. The train home this year was the first time she felt part of a close-knit group – the first time she felt like accepted just for being Luna.

She looked outside. It was a beautiful morning. She had time before breakfast and she thought she saw the perfect place for a Blibbering Humdinger nest in the grounds yesterday.

/Scene Break/

Harry popped back to the Manor and was the first down for Breakfast. Hermione came in a few minutes later and they shared a good morning kiss.

Harry asked, "How was your night?"

"I slept well, but I woke up early – too many things on my mind."

"Yeah, I know what you mean. Have you seen Tom or Luna yet today?"

"I saw Luna out on the grounds through the window in my room. I haven't seen Tom at all. This may be a strange thing to say, but I'm a bit worried about him. He's been Lord Voldemort for so long, Tom Riddle is going to have a hard time coming back."

"What you say is true Miss Granger," Tom said from the doorway, "reversing the damage that Dumbledore and I have inflicted upon myself will be extremely difficult."

Tom came over and sat at the table. Luna drifted in and seemed to float over to her seat. She had a smile on her face as she bid good morning to everyone.

Harry looked at Tom, "To be honest with you, I am a little surprised but quite delighted you are here this morning."

"I had a lot to think about last night." He looked at Hermione, "I read the book. So many things could have been different today had it not been for the people who we are fighting against."

Hermione raised an eyebrow and smiled, "We? I take it you have come to a decision?"

"Yes I have. The information you've shared with me makes me realize that I've been an unknowing pawn in a game I cannot win. I need to get something that I now know I've never had – control of my life and my destiny. Lord Voldemort will not get me there. I need to become Tom Riddle again. This morning I realized that undoing Voldemort is not something I can do alone. I ... ," Tom shook his head, "this is so strange – I have always relied on no one but myself since I was four. I can't do this alone."

Luna looked at him, "Tom, you're our first task as a team. I learned last year that a team can accomplish anything if they truly believe in their goal. We are the last descendents of the four founders. We need to work together. I believe you can do this."

Hermione and Harry both said, "I believe it too."

Tom looked at them in turn, "Thank you." He turned to Hermione, "Miss Granger..."

Hermione corrected him, "Please call me Hermione. We should all be on a first name basis."

The other two nodded.

Tom allowed himself a small smile, "Hermione, I will need your help researching how to reverse the damage to my soul and reintegrate my horcruxes."

"I've already been thinking about this. I inherited the entire Black Family library. The problem is that I don't think you are ready yet to set foot into Gringotts. Harry, can we get the house elves to bring the books here?"

"Sure we can. Jeeves?" The elf appeared at Harry's side. "Jeeves, can you please ask the staff to move the books from Hermione's vault at Gringotts to – Jeeves is there a room for a library in the guesthouse by the pond?"

"Yes, there is."

"OK, good. Can you ask the elves to move them there – provided that's OK with you Hermione? I'd like that house to be for your family."

"It's perfect Harry. Jeeves that would be a wonderful place to read and study."

"Very well, we will have them moved today."

With that Jeeves popped away.

Tom looked around the table. "Until we are ready to make ourselves known, we need to raise as little suspicion as possible. We also have to start finding those who will help us. I'm going to have to keep the public persona of Lord Voldemort for the time being but I'm going to try to redirect my followers. I think what I will do is give young Mr. Malfoy a task concerning the Headmaster and use the turmoil around Fudge to have Bella continue to plan the takeover of the Ministry. I'm sure the Death Eaters who have been arrested will be back in the fold shortly."

Harry responded, "I agree. The Headmaestro is going to know I'm not under his control any more once the will is read on the fourteenth. But he doesn't have to suspect I'm doing anything except a little teenage rebellion until we can announce ourselves properly. Now, as for those who we can enlist to help us, I think we can trust the Longbottoms and Moony although," he looked at Tom, "we're going to have to think carefully before announcing your presence to anyone."

Hermione spoke up, "What about the Weasleys? I'm pretty sure we can't trust Molly and I'm not sure I'd even trust Ginny and Ron if they were on our side. Ron tends to let his jealousy get in the way and Ginny loses all rational thought when she gets angry. But what about the rest of them?"

Harry thought for a second, "Let's start with the twins. Hermione and Luna, can you please visit them at their shop and try and get an idea of what they are thinking? Luna, if you can find out about any of the others it would help as well."

The two girls nodded.

Tom thought for a moment, "There is also Severus Snape who is a half-blood although that is not widely known. He would be very beneficial to our cause. I could speak with him and I think I can persuade him to at least think about joining us. He was also secretly infatuated with your mother, Harry. They were childhood friends."

Harry was shocked, "Snivellus? You've got to be kidding! He hates me! I remind him too much of my father. Besides, he's Dumbledore's agent."

"He's both my agent and Dumbledore's. However how do you think he'll react when he learns about your mother and what she found? Remember he is a half-blood and considered expendable by both the pureblood sides. Let me set something up for the two of us to talk to him. I will get back to you with the arrangements."

Harry sighed, "Yes, we should give him a chance," he smirked, "I suppose you and I hated each other even more before this and look at us now. At least Snape never tried to kill me." He looked around, "OK, so what are our plans for the day?"

Luna answered, "Hermione and I will go to Diagon Alley to visit the twins. And then we'll visit my dad at the Quibbler office and invite him for dinner on Saturday. Then I can go home and Hermione can come back here and start going through the library."

Hermione added, "I'll probably go home in between just to let my parents know everything is OK."

Harry nodded, "Tom, you are welcome to stay here in the Manor when you wish. No one can find us here if we don't want to be found."

"Thanks you Harry. I must go back to get my Death Eaters on their new assignments and talk to Severus. I shall return later and work with Hermione on our research."

Once breakfast and the others left, Harry summoned Jeeves and made a few plans of his own – after all, he had a will reading to plan. When he had gone to revise his will, Griphook had given him an inventory of all things Black and Potter. It was the Black Family list that he was more concerned with at the moment.

Ragnok had also provided him with the list of the rest of the Beneficiaries left behind by Sirius. It included: Ted and Andromeda Tonks, Nymphadora Tonks, Narcissa Malfoy, Draco Malfoy, Bellatrix LeStrange, Albus Dumbledore, and the Weasleys. The last ones were the ones he had the most trouble with. He didn't know which side they were on. Hopefully he would know before the will reading.

Harry pondered over who should get what. He saw a few things that were promising. He thought that it was not just what the item was, but how it was given to the intended recipient. "Hmm," Harry thought, "I wonder if I can get Remus to plan this out with me and maybe let me read the Marauder journals. I want to make sure that Sirius get's a true Marauder send-off."

A/N – Another chapter down. This chapter didn't really help the story progress, but is really more like the "Part 2" of the meeting the night before. I'll be starting chapter 11 soon and will be posting in a few days.

Chapter 11 – The Best Laid Plans

That same morning Albus Dumbledore was just leaving the Weasleys with a very important contract in his hand. He had convinced both Arthur and Molly to authorize a marriage contract for Ginevra. He chuckled to himself. Sirius 'untimely' demise had really played into this one – since Sirius had been Harry's legal guardian and the head of the House of Black, he was legally capable of arranging a marriage for the boy. Since Harry was still underage he couldn't object and Albus was determined to ensure that the contract was executed well before that changed. Potter's new guardian would be the new Lord Black since the Potter will was sealed until Harry become of age. He was pretty sure the new Lord Black – Draco Malfoy – would not consider changing the contract.

Even getting it in the will would be fairly straightforward – Albus had a whole story of how Sirius had approached him to talk to the Weasleys regarding the contract. Sirius had begun the contract before his death – Dumbledore had gotten him to sign his request to be declared innocent – and the Weasleys had not had a chance to approve it before Sirius died. As the Supreme Mugwump there would be virtually no question of people taking his word on that and allowing it to be included in the will as Sirius' final wish for his godson and legal ward.

Arthur and Molly had only been too happy to sign the contract – however for different reasons. Molly was aware of the intention to partition the Potter estate upon Harry's (also rather) untimely death. Arthur had needed some convincing. He truly believed that it was the last wish of Sirius as Dumbledore had presented it. However it was a long talk with his darling daughter who convinced him that marrying Harry was a dream come true and that she would love to spend the rest of her (she was thinking "his") life with him. When Arthur asked what Harry thought, Albus said that both he and Sirius wanted the marriage to take place as soon as possible after Ginny's fifteenth birthday in order to give Harry something to fight for. The love of Ginny would give Harry the power to defeat Voldemort.

With Harry in isolation and Dumbledore acting as his agent at the will, he would not have to know about the contract until the day of the

marriage. True, once he married he would be considered an adult and the Potter will would finally be unsealed, but by then it would be too late.

If anyone had been around to hear him as he disappeared, they would have heard a slight chuckle and the words, "I love it when a plan comes together."

/Scene Break/

Tom went back to his lair in full Voldemort. Only this time he had a good reason to throw his "Crucio" curses around. Any pureblood within eyesight of him as he walked to his study felt the burning pain of the curse. They all knew one thing – their "master" was more pissed than usual today.

When he finally got to his study and shut the door, Tom allowed himself to put Voldemort away for a while. It felt good to be able to do that. He'd have to get him back out soon, but he felt more relaxed that he had in decades (being a bodiless spirit was extremely stressful and not something he would recommend to anyone). He had to get things in motion here before he returned to Potter Manor.

He summoned Severus to his study. While he was waiting for the Potions Master to arrive, he planned on where he would get Snape to meet with him and Potter. He had just decided on a location when he heard a knock at the door.

"Open."

Snape came in with his cloak billowing, "You wanted to see me my lord?"

"Yes Severus. I have need of your services. Meet me at the Shrieking Shack in Hogsmeade tonight at 11pm. I have business elsewhere for the next week and the meeting tonight will determine if you will be useful enough to come with me."

"As you wish my lord. Will there be anything else?"

"No, you may leave now. Please send Bellatrix and Draco in before you leave."

"Master." Severus bowed and left the study.

Three minutes later there was a knock at the door, "Enter."

Bellatrix and Draco entered the room. Tom studied them through Voldemort's eyes. Part of him wanted to kill them right there for everything their kind had done to him. The funny thing is that no one would bat an eye if he tortured them both for no reason, but the deaths of pureblood Death Eaters at the hands of their master was unheard of and would cause a stir. No, it was better to keep them occupied on other things until he had no more need for them.

"Ah Bellatrix and young Mr. Malfoy, I have need of both your services."

They both bowed. Bella spoke first, "How can I be of service?"

"I want you to gather as many of our brethren as you can and come up with a plan to attack and take over the Ministry of Magic. The time is almost upon us where we will need to "cleanse" the government of the undesirables," "Purebloods like you two," he thought to himself, "and set up a new one. I need this to be subtle, we want to establish control of the government without the public becoming aware until it is too late."

Bella smiled a feral smile, "I will get right on it my lord. We have many contacts in the Ministry to help plan this. Should we also see what we could do to release those of us captured in the Department of Mysteries?"

"That is very good Bella. If you can get them back then do so. But remember the main goal is the plan to take over the Ministry and subtlety is the key. I would like a full plan in place with analysis and different scenarios by the end of August. This will take time but it is time we have."

“I will be leaving tonight for a week outside of the country. If Severus proves his worth tonight then he will be accompanying me. When I return I would like a full report and to see the first draft of the plan.”

Bellatrix could not stop grinning, “Yes, my lord. Thank you.” She bowed and left.

Draco looked at Voldemort expectantly, “My lord, I am ready to take the mark.”

“Ah, but young Draco, I have not yet found you worthy. “ Draco looked like he wanted to speak, “Was there something you wanted to say?”

“Yes, my lord. On the fourteenth Sirius Black’s last will and testament will be read at Gringotts. Since he did not have a son, I am next in line for the Head of the House of Black. After I become Lord Black, I will pledge the allegiance of the Black family to your cause.”

Voldemort’s face looked thoughtful while inside Tom was starting to have a bit of fun. He thought, “I’m going to turn this arrogant little prick’s attitude against him.”

“Draco, your father has let me down a number of times. How can I be sure you aren’t going to let me down here as well? How can I be sure that you won’t use your new title as Lord Black to gain favour with Dumbledore and turn against me?”

Draco thought for a moment and gave his answer to Voldemort.

“Very good Draco, I will accept that. Now for the real reason I called you here. I have an important mission for you. You will need to begin planning for this immediately. Succeed and you will be allowed to accept my mark. Fail, and your life will be forfeit.”

“What is this task?”

“During the next school year you must kill Albus Dumbledore.”

Draco was speechless.

“You see Draco, this will help make up for your father’s failures.”

Draco still could not move but the brain started working again, “Kill Dumbledore. He’s got to be fucking kidding! I just hope Aunt Bella gets Father out before I go back to school. I’ll need his help to plan. Maybe Snape will help.”

“Draco, did you hear my instructions?”

“Y-y-yes, my lord.”

“Very well then, you may leave. I expect you to come see me after the will.”

“Yes, my lord.” And with that Draco left.

Tom started laughing. “Oh that family is going to learn the meaning of the muggle term ‘Payback’s a bitch!’ I guess Lucius never told Draco not to count his chickens before they hatched – oh yes, that’s another muggle term.”

That being finished, he went through his study and picked out a few books worth taking with him. He walked back out through the lair in his Voldemort shell. Word had already spread from Draco and Bella that he would be gone. As soon as he got outside the wards he apparated to Potter Manor. As he passed through the wards, they stripped of the tracking charms two of the death eaters had cast on him and the new recruit Bella sent to follow him was diverted by the wards to an abandoned surveying camp in Antarctica to meet the remains of the last person who tried to follow someone through the Potter wards. Tom however arrived unscathed at the Manor and unaware of any of this.

“I have to talk to Harry about our appointment tonight,” he thought, “and then I’ll start my research into getting my soul back together.”

/Scene Break/

Hermione and Luna had no problem finding the Twins' shop. The bright colours made it stand out from the rest of the dull-coloured shops. They both laughed at the "U-NO-POO" poster. The shop was still closed but they saw the twins moving around inside so they knocked on the windows to get their attention. As soon as the twins saw who was at the door, Fred came over and opened it up.

"Well if it isn't"

"Our favourite little bookworm"

"And our neighbour."

The twins were falling into their normal style of speaking where they alternated while speaking a sentence.

Hermione said, "Gred,"

Luna added, "Forge."

"So what can we"

"Do for you today?"

Hermione said, "We were wondering if you knew why your sister and youngest brother have not even spoken to us since the incident at the Department of Mysteries. We can't even ask them since they have ignored us since that night and haven't even answered any letters. Neither of them has talked to Harry either."

The twins looked furious.

"Well, it looks like"

"Our little Gin-Gin"

"Is acting like"

"Our prat of a brother – the youngest one."

Luna spoke up, "So were wondering if they had a bad case of Wrackspurts. They can affect the brain."

The twins just looked at each other and shrugged.

Fred spoke up, "We'll find out what's going on."

George added, "I mean, you are like family and Harry"

"Our family owes him a number of life debts already"

"Not to mention he's our business partner"

"The one who believed in us"

"We'd never turn our back on him."

"Now Ron on the other hand"

"Is just a git."

Once Hermione had parsed it all together she smiled. "Thanks guys. You've been like my surrogate family in the wizarding world and we would at least like to know why Ron and Ginny are acting like they are."

The twins agreed to contact Hermione or Luna if they found out any reasons. Then after giving them a few WWW Sampler boxes, the girls left and headed over to the Quibbler offices. Luna was going to invite her father to the Manor on Saturday and she needed to tell him she would be staying at a friends' again that night.

The twins looked at each other.

"What do you think Gred?"

"I think its starting Forge."

"We'll have to take sides"

“Like we didn’t know that before.”

Fred smiled, “The choice is quite obvious”

George smiled, “Never in doubt.”

They decided to head back to the Burrow that night. There were a lot of things to discuss.

/Scene Break/

Harry had spent the morning planning dinner for Saturday with the elves. Jeeves had also given him a summary of the guesthouses on the property. Aside from the one he had already offered to the Grangers, he was going to offer one to the Longbottoms, and the Lovegoods. Jeeves would also get the portkeys ready.

He also wrote a reply to Neville inviting him and his Gran to the Manor on Saturday with the offer to stay for dinner if they wanted. Hedwig was more than happy to take the letter. He then added Neville Longbottom, Augusta Longbottom, and Xenophilius Lovegood to the Manor book.

If everything went well, they might reveal some of the situation to their guests. As a team the four of them would have to decide if the guests could be trusted with their largest secret.

As if on cue, Tom entered the room, “Harry I have arranged a meeting with Severus tonight at 11pm in the Shrieking Shack. Also, Voldemort’s organization believes he’ll be traveling out of the country for the next week or so. That way I can research how to ‘pull ourselves together’ in peace.” Tom also proceeded to tell Harry about his encounter with Bella and Draco. When he got to the part about Draco the will, Harry was on the floor laughing so hard. Even Tom had to chuckle a bit.

It was to this scene that Luna and Hermione arrived back at the Manor. The irony of the moment seeing Harry Potter sharing a laugh with Tom Riddle was not lost on either of them.

Luna was the first to speak, "What's go you two in such a jovial mood?"

Tom retold the story of his morning and once again ended with Draco. The girls had a good laugh as well.

Tom got back to business, "I think we should have Severus on our side. I would like if at least one of you could accompany me there tonight."

In the end all four agreed to go. Hermione went briefly back home to talk with her parents and to let them know she would be staying at the Manor again that night.

Luna had a lunch date with Neville to at his house so she excused herself and popped over there.

Harry had lunch with his former nemesis and they discussed the meeting for that night.

/Scene Break/

Percy Weasley was in shock. His new girlfriend Audrey had convinced him to reach out to his family and the results had not been entirely what he had expected.

He had approached his father a few days ago at lunch. While Arthur was cool to begin with, he could not hold a grudge against one of his children. He listened intently as Percy told him about Audrey. She was a muggleborn witch from Canada who was working at the Canadian consulate to the Ministry. They started having lunch together and it quickly became more serious.

Percy was able to talk to Audrey about things that he had not been able to talk about with anyone else. He told her about his estrangement from the family. She had helped him work through his issues and for the first time in his life, Percy felt comfortable with himself.

The meeting with his father had gone very well and Arthur was very happy to have his son back in his life. The next day Arthur met Audrey over lunch at the Ministry and the two of them hit it off extremely well.

Percy felt so good from Arthur's reaction that he even took Audrey to meet his twin brothers. After some good-natured teasing, the twins congratulated Percy and welcomed Audrey with open arms – in fact Percy had to break up the tag-team hug. Audrey had taken it all in stride and loved the twins and their shop.

All of that led up to today. Percy had decided to visit his mother to talk to her and tell her about Audrey. He had gone back to the Burrow this morning. At first Molly was overjoyed to see her son and the two of them talked about everything he had been up to – that is until he got to Audrey.

At first Molly was excited that Percy had fallen in love with a nice witch. However when Percy mentioned her being muggleborn, she got very angry. And told him that there was no way she wanted to meet Audrey at all. Percy left shortly after that very confused. He had no idea his mother was a blood purist.

He was extremely confused. He was going to have to talk to Arthur and the twins. He decided to get them to join him and Audrey for lunch tomorrow.

/Scene Break/

Hermione and Tom spent the rest of the afternoon pouring through the books that Tom had brought with him and the Black library that the elves had transferred to the guesthouse. Their first pass through the books simply sorted out any that even mentioned Horcruxes. That left around a dozen books to study.

After several hours of research, they believed that they had come up with a plan. Tom shook his head slowly, this was not going to be easy but then again he knew he did not deserve 'easy'. He had been responsible for ruining too many lives and deserved everything that was coming to him. He hoped that with his new companions he would

be able to help balance the equation. He was also determined to bring those who were responsible for influencing his choices in life to answer for their involvement as well.

Hermione and Tom made a list of what they would need to need to perform the required ritual. Hermione looked at the book she was reading and said, "This is a very complex potion. It doesn't take very long to brew, but the sheer number of ingredients is staggering and it requires extreme precision to get it to work."

"I know, that is one of the reasons I am hoping that Severus is open to our offer this evening."

Around 7pm the four of them got together for dinner.

Luna had a serene smile on her face. The visit with Neville and his Grandmother had gone very well. After lunch, Neville had suggested a walk around the grounds of the Longbottom Manor. Neville had summoned his newfound courage and had asked her to be his girlfriend. She had enthusiastically agreed. They spent the rest of the day talking, holding hands and even kissing. Luna told Neville that she and her father would also be at Potter Manor on Saturday. Neville smiled when he heard that and made a mental note to ask his Gran if he needed a will.

Over dinner Hermione and Tom informed the other two what they had found about reintegrating Horcruxes. They described the potion and ritual required to complete the reintegration. Tom would have to complete it six times.

The conversation turned to the meeting with Severus. They all had ideas on how to approach him and get him to listen to them. Eventually they agreed on the approach and what they would show him and also what they would have to do if he decided not to join them.

As soon as 10pm came they made their way to the Shrieking Shack to prepare. They all took their places and waited for Severus to arrive.

Severus showed up on time at 11pm. He came in through the tunnel from Hogwarts and found Voldemort sitting pacing next to the table.

“My lord. You have something to discuss with me?”

“Yes Severus. What I need from you is...” they were interrupted by a noise from the second floor.

Both pulled their wands and Voldemort was the first up the stairs. He used a banishing charm to throw open the bedroom door.

Severus was stunned, there stood Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, and Luna Lovegood. Voldemort looked at Harry, “Potter, to what can I attribute this meeting.”

“Um, bad timing?” The teenagers were visibly nervous. Harry had hidden something behind his back.

“Before I decide whether to kill the three of you, I want what you have hidden behind you,” he said menacingly.

Harry stood nervously defiant, “What do you mean?”

Voldemort snarled, “Bad answer Harry. I don’t ask twice.” With that he pointed his wand at Hermione whose eyes grew wide in surprise and terror when they heard him say, “Crucio.”

A/N – The character Audrey appeared in an interview JKR gave after DH came out. Little is known other than her first name and that Percy and her eventually have two children. I gave her a back-story to fit into Percy’s role in this story.

Chapter 12 – The Prince of Potions

Voldemort snarled, “Bad answer Harry. I don’t ask twice.” With that he pointed his wand at Hermione whose eyes grew wide in surprise and terror when they heard him say, “Crucio.”

Hermione stood frozen as the dreaded spell was cast. At the same moment, Luna pushed her to the floor and ended up on top of her as the spell past overhead and exploded against the wall. Harry stepped in front of the two girls to block the next spell.

“OK, OK, it’s just this,” he produced a stack of papers he had been holding in his hand.

Voldemort looked at the papers, “Severus, take those from Potter and find out what Harry felt was so important to hide from me.”

Voldemort kept his wand on the three as Snape stepped forward and took the papers from Harry. Once Severus was in front of him Tom winked at the three teens. They had pulled this off perfectly. He put on his Voldemort face again.

Severus for his part started reading the papers – Harry had already given his permission since he could not even try to picture Snape in any erotic story. He read the first page and just kept on reading. “This can’t be true,” he thought, “ but it makes logical sense and explains a lot of seeming inconsistencies in the world.”

He was so engrossed in what he was reading that he did not notice that Tom had lowered his wand, Harry had relaxed and Hermione and Luna had stood up and they were all just waiting for him to finish.

When Severus finally finished, he remembered where he was and looked up to see the other four staring at him. “My lord,” he paused, there was something a little to surreal about the situation. His master had his wand holstered his expression didn’t seem the same – it was more ‘human’. The other funny thing was that the three teens were also relaxed and everyone was looking at him expectantly. He was shaken out of his stupor by the sound of his master’s voice.

“Severus, please call me Tom. Why don’t we go back downstairs and talk about what you just read.”

Snape’s brain had gone into overload. No only was it busy trying to incorporate the paradigm-shattering information he had just read, but here was the Dark Lord using his own muggle name and openly being polite and almost friendly to the others. Then it hit him like shrapnel from one of Ron Weasleys exploding potions (i.e. 95 of his potions assignments) – the four from the prophecy.

He looked at Tom who had conjured a comfy chair to sit in, “You are the heir of Slytherin. That means,” he swung around and looked at the teens. In Sequence, Luna Harry and Hermione said, “Hufflepuff”, “Gryffindor” and “Ravenclaw”. Everyone looked at Severus as they watches his eyes show the pieces falling in place.

Tom spoke again, “Severus, think about I everything you read. Think about your life and the decisions and paths you have been forced to take and all of the inconsistencies in our world that no one questions openly. Does it not begin to make sense now?”

Snape shook his head, “Albus?”

“Is the mastermind behind it all,” said Hermione, “he is controlling both sides, ensuring that the half-bloods and muggleborn are the villains and the majority of the victims. They are weakening the will of the potential opposition in order to get consensus for pureblood supremacy. “

Harry spoke, “Professor – Severus – the four of us are offering you the same choice we offered Tom a few nights ago. We can obliviate any memory of this meeting and you can continue to believe you are a double agent while in reality you are setting yourself up as a half-blood sacrifice, or you can choose to work with us and gain independence in thought and action from the master manipulator. Our group is small and we have no single person in control. We have to build on all of our strengths to out-think and out-maneuver our opponents.”

He continued, "I know we have had a complex history. But knowing what I know and how we have all been manipulated in our lives and beliefs, I'm willing to put our history aside. Hell, if Tom and I can patch things up and work together, we should be best friends soon." He smirked and held out his hand to the Potions teacher.

Severus looked at the four and then at Harry's gesture of goodwill. "I choose to live my own life and make my own decisions. I accept your offer," and took Harry's hand. The other three smiled at their new ally.

"I have one question though – why the act earlier? I know the spell was real – I've felt it enough times – but looking back, I can see now you three knew it was coming and choreographed it perfectly. Luna's reaction was a bit too fast for the situation."

Luna laughed, "If you had come in and found Lord Voldemort having tea with his mortal enemy and his friends, the sheer audacity of it would have caused you to not have any trust in us at all. We had to put you in a believable situation where you would have an open enough mind to read those documents."

"Quite clever. I commend you all."

Tom chuckled (something that was not lost on Snape), "we all played our parts, but Luna was the architect of the plan. Altering the reality of a situation is something she seems to have a particular knack for."

Severus considered this for a moment and then nodded.

"Severus, the Death Eaters already know I will be gone for a week and that you would be coming with me. What did you tell Albus?"

"I told him that I would be traveling with you for the next week."

Harry spoke up, "so your presence won't be missed?"

"No."

Harry said, "I'll be right back." He touched his ring and disappeared. In the few seconds he was gone, Severus felt a tingling in his brain

and suddenly he knew something he didn't before. When Harry popped back, he asked, "Will you join us at the Manor?"

Severus nodded again.

Suddenly an elf appeared. "Master Harry! They are coming to Privet Drive. The Headmaster!"

Harry said, "Oh crap – gotta go!" and with that he was gone.

The rest of the group just looked at each other – Hermione and Luna were shaking their heads. Severus looked at them questioningly.

"Harry needs to keep making appearances at Privet Drive so his Order guards think he's there. This is the second time this has happened," explained Luna.

Severus nodded once again, "I've had a couple of shifts. You mean to tell me we've been guarding an empty house?" There were nods all around. He did something that the girls had never seen – he burst out laughing. "Dumbledore doesn't even suspect anything. This is too much."

The four of them laughed as the girls activated their necklaces and Tom and Severus apparated back to the Manor.

/Scene Break/

Harry had prepared this time. He had the ring take him to the basement of number 4. He quickly sat in the corner and picked up the items beside him. They were meant to send a message, but he doubted Dumbledore would receive it. That made it even sweeter.

Albus Dumbledore and Alastor Moody came through the front door of number four and headed straight up the stairs.

"Just as you had suspect Alastor, the room is empty. Where can Harry be? He made a promise not to leave the house."

As they stood in silent thought they heard a sound.

Thump-thump.

Thump-thump.

Thump-thump.

They slowly made their way downstairs.

Thump-thump.

Thump-thump.

The sound seemed to be coming from the basement. Wands drawn, they opened the door.

Thump-thump. Slap.

Thump-thump. Slap

Thump-thump. Slap

As they went downstairs, the sound grew louder.

Thump-thump. Slap

Thump-thump. Slap

Then they saw it. Harry was sitting against one wall and throwing a type of ball at the floor near the opposite wall. It would hit the floor, bounce off the wall and then rebound back to Harry and he caught it in some sort of oversized glove.

Dumbledore spoke up, "Harry?"

Harry looked startled. "Professor, what brings you here?"

"We thought you had disappeared. What are you doing down here?"

“Well, I’ve been watching a lot of television lately and I saw a movie where one of the characters spent a lot of time alone and did this to pass the time. Dudley had a baseball and glove so I thought I’d give it a try. It’s very relaxing. In fact, I now know what Professor Snape meant when he told me to ‘Clear my mind’.”

“How long have you been down here?”

“A couple of hours. Why?”

“We could not see you and assumed you were missing.”

“What do you mean ‘could not see me’? Do I need to stand by the windows all the time?”

“No, for instance Alastor’s eye can see you as you move about the house.” Dumbledore was not going to tell him only Alastor could do that.

“Professor, I find this lack of privacy disturbing. Are your guards watching me at all times? Even when I take a shower?” His voice was rising.

“Harry, it’s for the greater good.”

“It’s for the greater good that you have people spying on me? Watching me shower? I thought the P in the name was Phoenix, not Pedophile!”

Albus winced – this was not going how he planned. “Harry it’s for your own protection.”

“PROTECTION? Protection from what? You put up the wards around this house. Not even you can apparate in or out. You’ve even told me portkeys won’t work inside the wards. No one can get in the house without having to walk across the bloody road first. So tell me again, why are Order members watching me shower?” Harry was seething outside. Inside he was pretty sure that only Moody could look into the house, but he saw a chance for a bit of freedom here.

“Very well Harry, maybe this is not completely necessary. I will instruct the order members not to look into the house.”

“Not good enough. You’ve already violated my privacy. I want an oath from both of you that you will not watch me while I am in the house and will ensure that no other Order member does the same. Headmaster, our ongoing relationship depends on this oath.”

Dumbledore thought hard on this. The boy wasn’t asking for much, just some privacy. He deliberated silently with himself, “One little victory for him could strengthen my control in the long run. Refuse this and I may lose control of Harry completely.”

“Very well Harry,” Albus and Alastor gave the oath. There was a brief flash of light as their magic accepted it.

“Thank you.” Harry clamed down while his brain was celebrating. “Now was there anything else?”

“No, Harry.”

“Professor, when do you think I will be able to contact my friends? It is pretty lonely.”

“Harry, right now the situation is very unstable and this is the only place you are safe. I will see what I can do. Perhaps I will be able to get Ron to visit you however I can’t do that until I know it will be safe for both of you. That may not be for a few more weeks.”

Harry thought, “Gee I wonder if that will not be until after the will reading.” He put on what he thought was a slightly sad and deflated posture. “I understand Headmaster.”

“We’ll be on our way Harry. Good night.”

“Good night. I take it you can see yourselves out?”

As Albus and Alastor walked back up the stairs the sound started again. This time joined by Harry whistling a strange tune. (A/N The theme for the particular movie)

Thump-thump. Slap

Thump-thump. Slap

Thump-thump. Slap

They walked outside and as soon as they were at the edge of the wards they apparated away.

A lone figure remained on the street hidden under an invisibility cloak. Nymphadora Tonks was settling into her favourite place to spend her shift guarding Harry. Her mind was filled with a number of different thoughts and she was fighting an internal battle. She knew it wasn't right for Harry to be completely isolated especially after the loss of his godfather. What she had heard about his life up until now from Sirius and Remus was disturbing.

"What the hell is Dumbledore thinking?" she thought to herself. She was surprised no one else in the Order except for Remus questioned Dumbledore's actions with Harry. She even thought about going in there herself to talk to Harry but the extra wards Dumbledore placed recently made that impossible. Albus had put wards on both the front and rear doors that would warn him if anyone tried to enter or leave the house.

"I'll talk to Remus after the meeting tomorrow. Maybe we can convince Albus to let us spend some time with poor Harry.

Meanwhile back in the house 'poor Harry' was having a good laugh. He had received magical oaths from Dumbledore and Moody not to use magic to spy on him. That means that he really didn't have to spend a lot of time here and he shouldn't have any more of these emergencies. Harry headed back to the Manor to get some sleep.

When he got back to the Manor, the other four were waiting for him. As he explained the situation Alastor and Albus found him in Hermione giggled. The others had blank faces until Harry explained the symbolism and then they chuckled as well. Harry then told him

about the oaths he made the two of them give which now allowed him to even spend less time at Privet Drive.

He found out that while he was dealing with Dumbles, the other three founders had brought Severus up to date with everything including the potion required for the rituals. Severus was already deep into studying the recipe and making notes about the ingredients.

Harry took Tom aside while the girls were helping Snape. "Tom, Remus Lupin will be coming over tomorrow, and then on Saturday we will be having the girls' parents and the Longbottom's over as well. I'm not sure yet who we can tell about the four of us. What I'd like to do is offer you and Severus the use of one of the guesthouses to prepare for the ritual."

"Thank you Harry that is very thoughtful of you. I'm also not sure about announcing my involvement to anyone yet. Perhaps Remus can be trusted with everything but I'll let that be your decision. As for the rest of the people, I would think that the girls should decide about what to reveal to their parents and the three of you decide what to do with the Longbottoms. I will take the most secluded guesthouse available. If what I suspect is true, the ritual may make you call it another Shrieking Shack."

Harry nodded. It was late and he bid everyone a good night. As he was settling into bed, he heard his door open and close quickly. In normal circumstances his night vision was bad but without his glasses he could not see a thing. Sitting very still trying to discern movement or a noise he was suddenly caught unaware by a pair of warm lips on his. After a smoldering kiss, he heard a familiar voice whisper "you forgot the goodnight kiss," and a moment later his door opened and closed again.

/Scene Break/

There were two people who couldn't sleep no matter how hard they tried. Fred and George had what many would consider an eventful evening. They had gone back to the Burrow to investigate what was happening.

/Flashback/

Fred and George had apparated back to the Burrow with a loud Crack! They could apparate silently, they both felt it took a lot of the fun out of it They were greeted with the familiar bear-like hugs of their mother who was happy to see them every chance she could get.

“Fred, George, it’s so nice of you to come home. We weren’t expecting you until Sunday.

Fred started, “Well mum”

“We heard some news today about”

“Our younger siblings and we”

“Wanted to get to the bottom of it.”

Molly wondered what this was about so she called out, “Ronald! Ginny! Can you please come down to the kitchen?”

Ron and Ginny came into the kitchen to see Fred and George sitting there. Ginny ran over to hug her brothers and Ron said, “What brings you guys here?”

The twins became serious. Fred started, “We had a visitor today who gave us some news.”

George continued, “What’s happening between you two and your friends?”

Ginny decided to play it coy, “Which ones, I have so many...”

That irked Fred, “You know who we mean! But just in case let me be more specific – Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, Luna Lovegood.”

George said, “Remember the people you fought Death Eaters with?”

Ron looked at them, “Nothing’s wrong. In fact I’m going to ask Hermione to be my girlfriend when we get together.”

Ginny added, "As for Harry, he needs to apologize for dragging us to the DoM. He could have gotten us killed and ended up getting Sirius killed."

Fred and George were speechless. George finally sputtered, "WHAT!"

Ron defend his sister, "It's true. It's all Harry's fault. He allowed himself to get tricked by Death Eaters. But then again, that was his whole plan when he formed the DA."

Fred could not believe what he was hearing, "Hang on, you and Hermione had to convince him to start the DA in the first place."

"It just shows how sneaky he is manipulating us into asking him. Harry was preparing us for his own personal war."

Molly spoke up, "Exactly. Harry has gone too far. He should not be convincing children to fight. He should be letting the Order and the Ministry handle things. I just hope he can be turned away from becoming a dark wizard."

Fred and George were beside themselves, "Dark Wizard? Harry? Are you out of your mind? Do you remember he fought a Basilisk single handed to save Ginny? Do you remember who saved DAD by letting us know he'd been attacked?"

"Well that's how Dark Wizard's start. They get the confidence of people as they grow in power."

Fred said, "I don't believe what I'm hearing. This is Harry bloody Potter we are talking about. He's like a member of this family."

Molly agreed, "That's why we have to help him stay light. We have to do what we can and help Albus steer him in the right direction. We need to keep him on our side and doing the right thing."

Fred gave George a look. George immediately understood. They had developed a secret method of communication that no one else knew.

Fred got up and stormed out. George looked at his Mother, "Mum, I understand. I'll talk to Fred. Don't worry we'll do the right thing." With that he got up and left.

/End Flashback/

Fred sighed, "Did you believe that story?"

"Not a word. Harry taught us to help us survive."

"And knowing him he tried to go to the DoM alone and the rest of them refused."

"Sounds like he's rebelling against Dumbledore."

"He rebelled when he invested in our business."

"He rebelled when he agreed to teach us."

"Brother dear, I don't think we are in a position to condemn anyone who flaunts authority."

"I completely agree oh brother of mine."

"What do you think about Ron and Hermione?"

They said in unison, "Never happen."

/Scene Break/

Far away from Diagon Alley in another part of the country a blonde boy was having problems sleeping. The same thought had been going through his head for several hours, "How does he expect me to kill Dumbledore?"

/Scene Break/

Another boy was having problems sleeping for a different reason. "I have to meet her father!" The thought was keeping Neville awake.

/Scene Break/

Albus Dumbledore was pacing in his office. He was trying to figure out what to do with one Harry Potter. Harry seemed to still be confrontational with him. Perhaps the isolation wasn't working as well as Dumbledore hoped. He knew that Harry had been home for less than a week, but Harry's resolve seemed to be getting stronger, not weaker. This needed to change.

He thought about finding a reason to bring the Dursleys back from their vacation. However Vernon was not easily controlled. While Albus did not care about Harry getting roughed up a bit, he thought Vernon might actually kill Harry if he was forced to come back from vacation too early. Dumbledore did not want Harry dead – yet.

Harry was naturally resistant to the imperious curse and obliviate was a bit too much of a risk.

Suddenly he had an idea. Harry has too much freedom. He was still a bit limited in what he could do. It would take a bit of planning and moving up some schedules, but the sooner he got this done the better. He had to get Harry back under his thumb.

Albus sighed and decided he needed to get some sleep. Tomorrow would be a very busy day.

A/N – I still haven't decided what role Tonks will play. I'm on the fence as to whether she will play significant part in the story or not. Any opinions either way?

Chapter 13 – The Name is Tonks, Not Nymphadora!

As the sun rose the next morning it found Albus in his office sending out a number of owls to get his plan in motion. He had been up since 4am writing letters to various witches and wizards. He was going to have to pull a lot of strings to get his plans in place. He wasn't too worried – the entire wizarding world owed him and he was not above collecting over and over again.

Once the owls were gone, he decided on an early breakfast before he got ready to head to London. The Wizengamot would have to make a decision today if he had any say in it.

Tonks had been thinking all night. There was something not right about this whole situation and she had not been able to come up with any possible explanation that would make it right. She needed to see Remus sooner rather than later.

As soon as Mundungus showed up, she briefed him about her night watch (leaving out her doubts) and apparated back to her flat. She took a quick pepper-up potion and floo-called Remus.

"Wotcher Remus, are you there?" Tonks voice said from his hearth.

Remus looked up from his Breakfast, "Good morning Tonks. Had breakfast yet?"

"Nope."

"Well come on through. I would enjoy the company."

His fire flared green and Tonks came tumbling through. Remus had a soft spot for the young Auror but that was as far as he let himself get. He had reconciled himself to the fact that he would be alone due to his furry little problem.

Tonks sat at the table across from Remus and helped herself to some breakfast.

"Tonks, are you OK? It looks like something is bothering you."

Tonks was unsure. Since Sirius' death, Remus had seemed to become the lone dissenting voice in the Order when it came to Harry. If there was anyone she thought she could trust with her worries, it would be the last of Harry's parents' closest friends. Still, she was nervous as she began.

"Remus, I'm worried about Harry. He's just lost his godfather, and for some reason Albus keeps him locked up and isolated. It's just not right. All I've ever received from Albus is talk about 'The Greater Good' but he overuses that and I find it extremely patronizing."

"I spent all of my watch last night trying to come up with a reasonable and logical explanation as to why Harry is being kept isolated from his friends and the world. The disturbing part is that I came up with a number of logical and plausible reasons but none of them fit my idea of 'The Greater Good'. Remus I think I'm losing my trust in Albus as a leader."

Remus looked at Tonks and was deep in thought. He was trying to think about the next words he would say. He knew Albus was starting to lose confidence in him since Remus publicly voiced his displeasure with Albus' treatment of Harry. He came to a decision.

Tonks was growing more and more nervous as she looked for some response from Remus. As she had talked his expression had hardened and now it had been over a minute since she finished talking and he still had not said anything. She got up to leave, "Remus, I'm probably just being paranoid forget ..." she was stopped by a hand around her wrist and she looked into the werewolf's eyes seeing a softened expression.

"Tonks, please stay. I'm sorry but I was lost in my own thoughts. You know I've been critical of Albus for the exact same reasons but I'm also careful to whom I give my trust. Tonks, I apologize but I had to decide whether you were here for the reasons you said or if you were here as some sort of loyalty test of Dumbledore's."

Tonks started to say something.

“No, please don’t interrupt. I know that you are not here at the request of Dumbledore and that you are probably just as scared of me informing Dumbledore, as I am that he sent you here. What I’m trying to say Tonks is that I trust you.” With that he released his grip.

Tonks processed what he said and impulsively hugged him. Remus tentatively returned the hug but backed away a few seconds later. Neither knew that the same certain thoughts they had passed through the others mind as well.

With both of them more relaxed and a bit embarrassed they sat back down. Remus asked Tonks, “I’m meeting someone who shares our concerns for lunch. Would you like to join me?”

Tonks smiled cheekily, “Remus, are you asking me out on a date?” She lengthened her eyelashes and batted them at him.

Remus sputtered, “Um, well, what I mean is...”

Tonks laughed – it was funny to see a werewolf blush, “Interesting. I didn’t expect that reaction,” she thought. “Remus, I’m just teasing.” He started laughing too. Tonks continued, “Yes, I would like to accompany you and meet this person.”

Remus said, “I just need to let him know.”

Tonks watched as Remus called his Patronus – she thought it was a small dog – and proceeded to tell it something. It went bounding off.

“Interesting patronus – a puppy?”

“No – it a wolf cub. This one is fairly recent. I don’t have too many happy memories with my condition, but the cub appeared shortly after I got to know Harry. Sirius and I took to referring to him as our cub since he was our best friends’ only child.”

A few minutes later a large stag appeared and in a familiar voice replied, “We’ll see you at noon.”

Tonks was wondering whom this stag belonged to when she realized she now knew of a place called 'Potter Manor'. Her eyes opened wide and looked at Remus.

He smiled and shook his head at the unasked question. "It's his story to tell. In the meantime, what do you want to do?"

"Well, I was wondering if you could tell me about your school years with Sirius. I've heard rumours and he told me a few things. You guys were called the Marauders right?"

"Yes, however if I'm going to let you in on this I insist you call me Moony."

They smiled at each other and talked the whole morning.

/Scene Break/

Harry woke up refreshed that morning. He really didn't have to worry about going back to Privet Drive anymore. His elves were taking turns turning lights on and off and keeping watch for Dumbledore. He got up and got ready for the day.

Hermione was just leaving her room as he finished and they shared a 'good morning' hug and kiss and walked down to breakfast together holding hands. When they entered the dining area they saw that Luna and Severus were already there.

"Good morning Luna, Severus," Harry noticed the empty coffee cup on the table, "where's Tom this morning?"

Severus was still not used to using his given name, "The Dark ... He is already down at the guesthouse we will be using. This morning we will be preparing the ingredients for the potion and should be ready to start brewing this evening."

"OK. Remus Lupin will be coming by for lunch today – now, now Severus we all need to put our pasts behind us and get along," Harry said in answer to Snape's grimace and then continued, "I'm going to

let him read the whole document. After that, if he's OK with it, I'm going to bring him down to meet Tom."

Severus looked at him, "Do you think it is wise?"

"We need to get Moony fully into our plans as soon as possible. If he's not fully on side after reading the documents, I'll show him the orphanage memory we showed you last night. But I see your point, if I don't think he's ready to meet Tom, I won't force him to do so."

Severus nodded stiffly. Just as he was getting up to leave, silver shape which looked very much like a puppy came bounding in the room and stopped in front of Harry.

"Harry, Tonks came here to talk to me today. I really think she needs to talk to you – all of you. Do you mind if she joins us at the Manor for lunch?" said the puppy in Moony's voice.

Severus looked at Harry, "This might complicate matters."

"Or, it could help us out a lot. If Moony thinks she should be coming here then we should hear her out and make up our minds."

Harry conjured his Patronus and asked it to send the reply, "We'll see you at noon," to Moony. As soon as the stag was on its way, Harry asked Jeeves to get the Manor book and added Nymphadora Tonks to the list.

"Severus, can you please let Tom know of our plans for lunch and also that we may be stopping by around 3:00? Also you both know that if you require anything, please feel free to ask any of the house elves."

Snape thanked Harry and left. As he was walking across the grounds to the house where Tom was waiting for him, he reflected on the past 24 hours. He still had a tough time comprehending the reality of the situation. Harry Potter and Tom Riddle were now allies against the Pureblood families aligned with the self-proclaimed 'Leader of the Light'.

He also realized how his 'betrayal' of Lily had been a set-up from the start. He was not the Order's spy in the Death Eaters, why would two sides of the same organization require a spy. No, he was the half-blood scapegoat – playing the double agent and also making half-blood and muggleborn students miserable while favouring the purebloods who he secretly hated with a passion. "Well," he smiled with his thought, "that's one thing that is going to change come September."

/Scene Break/

It was almost noon when Albus left the Ministry. He had managed to get what he wanted. The special sitting of the Wizengamot had listened to his unusual request and it had been granted. Once that was completed, it took him no time to get Minister Fudge and his Undersecretary on board as well. Now he just had to visit Gringotts with the document he had in his hands.

Unbeknownst to any of them, Percy had heard the entire conversation. In his position as Fudge's assistant he was always pretty much treated as invisible unless wanted for some task or errand. It had never really bothered him since it came with the territory, however at this moment he realized it was a godsend.

He wasn't sure about what it all meant. "Maybe Audrey and the twins might be able to make something of it," he thought.

/Scene Break/

Arthur Weasley looked at the clock and made his way from his office to the lifts. He was meeting the twins, Percy and Audrey for lunch. Anyone who knew Arthur would have noticed that he was not his normal self. No, Arthur had a very serious look on his face, as he was deep in thought.

So many things had changed over the past month that he had trouble coping with it all. Percy had come back into his life from his self-imposed exile. That lovely girl Audrey was responsible for it and he was happy his son had found someone he loved and who loved him

back. Arthur liked Audrey right away and saw how good she and Percy were for each other.

The twins had opened up their shop and by all reports were doing a spectacular business. Even the Prophet's business section reported that Zonko's sales were down this year. Arthur had never worried about the twins. Their marks may have not been the best at school, but that was because their brilliance lay elsewhere. If they had been tested for their potions, charms and transfiguration ability based on their own inventions Arthur was sure they would have received top marks with distinction on their NEWTS.

He knew that the twins had their heart set on a shop since before they went to Hogwarts. Sometimes he was frustrated by the fact that he could not have helped them along further – Molly was dead-set against it and besides, there was not enough money – but yet somehow they had managed to find enough to open up the shop. Arthur suspected that a certain Mr. Potter had provided them with the initial investment. The timing around the end of the tri-wizard tournament that was followed by a summer where the twins made great leaps and bounds with their business was not lost on him. When you added the facts that Harry nearly threw the money back at Fudge and the twins uncharacteristically bought Ron a new set of dress robes, it pointed to Harry.

Harry – there was an enigma. Arthur liked – no loved – the young man. He was like a seventh son. That Harry turned out the way he had was a miracle in and of itself. He had met the muggles that Dumbledore had placed him with and heard rumours and stories about his life there from Ron and Hermione. He still didn't understand or agree to Dumbledore's reasons for putting him there. Blood Wards or not, if half the stories he heard were true, the boy would have been safer at Malfoy Manor. However instead of being hardened and hating the world, Harry was a very shy and loving person. His loyalty to his friends was such that he would have made the perfect Hufflepuff. He had befriended Ron and through that friendship Ron had been able to chart a course out of his older brothers' shadows.

At age 12, Harry had cemented his bond with the Weasley clan when he had faced a millennium-old Basilisk alone and defeated it to save

Ginny. There was nothing the Weasley's could ever do to repay Harry for that – not that he would ever ask for anything in return. Arthur too, owed a life debt to Harry – just last December, Harry had been able to warn the Order in time to save his own life.

Arthur's thoughts led him to thinking about the fight the kids had at the DoM. Fourteen Death Eaters versus 6 students – two of them still in fourth year. They were lucky any of them came out alive let alone all alive and – with the help of the Order – capturing twelve Death Eaters. Even Fudge arrived in time with Ministry Aurors to see Voldemort leave.

However there had been a cost. Bellatrix killed Sirius and Voldemort had possessed Harry. All of the students had been injured to some degree but their different reactions to the effects of the battle made Arthur think.

When he had seen Harry in the school infirmary, he saw a distant sunken look in his eyes. The double trauma of losing his godfather and being possessed by Voldemort had taken their toll on the boy's psyche. But he was more concerned for his friends than himself and kept constant vigil over Hermione's bed while she recovered.

The reaction he did not expect came from his own family. Molly was livid when she found out. She blamed Harry for the injuries sustained by the other children and had even gone so far as to say, "The boy even got his own godfather killed."

Arthur had thought that it was just the heat of the moment, but she had not softened over the past month since the battle. The other troubling part of this situation was that Ron and Ginny seemed to agree with her. As far as he could tell, neither had talked to Harry or the other three students since the battle. Albus seemed to agree in part with them and thought that Harry should be isolated from his friends over the summer to allow him to sort out his priorities and learn from his mistakes.

Then there was this marriage contract. Sirius had never mentioned to him anything about an arranged marriage between Harry and Ginny. But yet Albus had the proper documents signed by Sirius. Ginny's

agreement was also a surprise since she had been vehemently Anti-Harry. However Arthur had a soft spot for his daughter and he could not find it in himself to refuse her plea for him to sign it.

All of this left Arthur in a confused and conflicted mindset as he walked into the Leaky Cauldron. He looked around and saw the twins along with Percy and Audrey already deep in conversation. Audrey had seen him and greeted him with a genuine smile. She waved him over to the table.

The boys all looked up and smiled, "Dad!"

Arthur smiled too, "Hi sons. Hello Audrey."

"Hello Mr. Weasley."

"Audrey, it's Arthur."

He sat down with them and caught up on the small talk. He could see that the twins were in their element running the shop. He had never seen them put so much energy and focus into any other thing they had ever done. And Percy, you just had to look at him to see he was in love and that Audrey was as well. He was proud of these boys and the way their lives seemed to be headed.

Arthur could sense however that there was an undercurrent of tension around the table from his boys. He was wondering how to broach the subject when Percy spoke up.

"Dad, did Mum mention I went to visit her at the Burrow yesterday?"

"No. She didn't mention it. How did it go?"

"Well, at first it went alright. She seemed happy to see me and was pretty excited at first when I told her about Audrey. But then," Percy hesitated. Arthur noticed that Audrey squeezed his hand tighter. "But then she got really angry when I told her that Audrey was muggleborn. She started going on that there would be no mudbloods in our family and that she never wanted to meet her. I've never heard Mum act like

that. What's worse is that Ron and Ginny backed her up. To tell you the truth Dad, I've never felt so hurt in my entire life."

Arthur was stunned. Molly acting like a blood purist? Ginny and Ron too? He had never felt so ashamed towards part of his family. Before he could say anything, Fred spoke up.

"We had a strange visit to the Burrow yesterday evening as well. You see, Hermione and Luna dropped by our shop yesterday."

"And asked why our brother and sister were being prats."

"So we went home last night."

"While you were out."

"And tried to talk to Mum and the two prats."

"We found out that Ron fancies that he'll be Hermione's boyfriend."

"Which is strange since he hasn't talked to her since she was injured."

"And even stranger after Percy's experience because she is a muggleborn as well."

"The other thing was their reaction to Harry. "

"Yeah, they blamed him for the fight at the Ministry."

"For getting the rest of them injured."

"Even for getting Sirius killed."

"They even suspect he's a dark wizard."

Arthur and Percy looked at the twins incredulously. Arthur said, "Harry? Dark? How could they say that after all he's done for our family?"

Fred continued, "Well, we asked the same question. Mum explained that Dark Wizards do that sort of thing to keep people's confidence while they grow in power."

"Honestly Dad, we're not sure what to think of the three of them right now."

"I mean we had to beg Harry to teach us last year."

"The DA was the best education we ever had at Hogwarts."

"Where else would we have learned the Patronus charm and been successful?"

"Harry has never done anything to make us doubt him."

"And now Dumbledore has him locked away with that family again."

"If we are forced to choose sides, we've already made our decision."

Surprisingly, Audrey was able to follow the twins' normal rhythm of alternating speech and said, "Let me get this straight. Harry Potter, your brother and sister and three other students fought off Death Eaters at the Ministry of Magic. All of them survived with injuries and the only casualty was a man named Sirius who if I understand right was Harry's godfather. Now Harry is being isolated from his friends by the Headmaster of his school, and some those friends actually blame him for everything? Sound more like he is being set up for something."

The rest of the table went silent. It was sobering to hear the situation put that way by someone who had never been part of it.

Arthur looked at his sons and Audrey. "Fred and George get back in touch with Hermione and see what you can find out. I'm going to have a talk with Molly, Ron and Ginny tonight. I'll also try and talk to Albus tonight at the order meeting."

"There's one other thing Dad," Percy said. "Dumbledore was in the Minister's office this morning." He went on to explain what he had

heard. The others were shocked by what they heard. Once he was done, they were ready to go – each even more determined to carry out their task.

As they walked out of the Leaky Cauldron, Audrey looked at Percy and said, “He is being set up.”

/Scene Break/

It was nearly noon when Harry greeted Moony and Tonks in the entrance hall. Tonks looked like she had a thousand questions but Harry assured her all of them would be answered soon enough.

Over lunch with Hermione and Luna, Harry explained about the letter from Sirius and the will reading on Monday. Tonks laughed a number of times as he described his recent dealings with Dumbledore and especially the oath he got last night.

Harry for his part noticed the little glances being shared between Tonks and Moony. He noticed because they were the same glances shared between himself and Hermione. He smiled inwardly and thought of something that may help them along.

Once lunch was over they retired to the sitting room. Tonks looked over at Harry, “You’ve told me about getting adopted, getting the Black and Potter inheritances, having this manor and outsmarting Dumbledore but, there is still something else, and it’s not the fact that you’re now dating Hermione.”

Harry shook his head, “How did you know?”

“It was not ‘if’ but ‘when’ you two would get together. In fact, Moony does this mean I won the pool?”

Remus nodded.

Harry shook his head again and continued, “But to answer your question Tonks, there is more. Sirius and my mom also left me some information. This information fundamentally changed the way I saw the wizarding world.”

Moony leaned forward, "How so?"

"Let me ask you a few questions. Tonks, ever wonder why you were the only Order member hurt at the DoM? Ever wonder why Death Eaters only send killing curses at non-Pureblood enemies? As an Auror, have you ever wondered why you are only authorized to incapacitate a Death Eater but not use more lethal curses? Remus, ever wonder why the laws regarding werewolves were enacted when for the most part you are only really dangerous one night per month?"

Both Tonks and Remus slowly nodded. They had never stopped to think of things in that particular manner. Hermione produced a stack of papers.

Harry said, "Sirius left me these papers which begin t explain everything."

Tonks and Moony started reading. Within a few second Moony just looked at Harry and blushed. Tonks kept on reading. She finally looked up, "How did Sirius know I felt this way about Remus?"

Remus looked at her, "What? No, this is a spell that Sirius put on the parchment. Harry didn't give us permission to read it so it shows the reader in an erotic story. Did you really mean it?"

"Yep. I do like you. And this section right here looks interesting – it requires a lot of flexibility though."

Remus started to blush even more.

Harry did not want to see where this was going since it looked like Tonks was ready to read it out loud, "I give Nymphadora Tonks and Remus Lupin permission to read the entirety of the documents in front of them."

Tonks looked down and the story was completely gone. "Hey, I was reading that!" She turned to Remus and winked, "Guess we'll have to write our own."

Remus sputtered, "Um, yes, well, let's read what this says now."

Harry, Hermione and Luna watched on as Tonks and Moony read the papers. They observed as two more people had their long-held beliefs irrevocably changed. Once they were done, Tonks looked at Harry. "Is this true?"

Luna responded, "Yes, as far as we can tell it is. A number of things have happened to us over the past few days which further reinforced it."

Remus spoke up, "The prophecy mentioned 'the four' and Lily and Sirius believed it to be the heirs of the four founders. Any ideas there?"

Hermione spoke up, "Harry, Luna and myself are three namely, Gryffindor, Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw respectively. We've confirmed that."

Suddenly it dawned on Remus who the fourth was, "You can't involve the heir of Slytherin! YOU KNOW WHO HE IS DON'T YOU?"

Harry said, "Remus, calm down. Yes we know who he is."

Tonks looked a bit confused, "Who?"

Luna said very plainly, "Tom Riddle."

Remus was not getting any calmer, "YOU MEAN LORD BLOODY VOLDEMORT!"

Tonks' eyes went wide, "You are kidding aren't you? Harry, he murdered your parents, he has tried to kill you a few times, he"

"He was manipulated worse than any others. You two read about the conspiracy. Here, I want both of you to take a look at this memory," he pointed towards the pensieve in the corner, "Once you are done we can continue."

Remus and Tonks went over and entered the pensieve. The other three had seen the memory from the orphanage and Tom had even provided some memories from before and after Dumbledore's visit to complete the picture.

It was nearly an hour before Tonks and Remus returned. Tonks brushed away some tears, "That bastard," was all she could say.

"If you are talking about Dumbledore, then I completely agree." He nodded to Hermione.

Hermione produced an old book. "This may be the only existing copy of Hogwarts – A History from before Dumbledore's modification occurred. You are free to read it, but to summarize, there are a few key things that Albus changed – The four founders were close friends until their deaths, Slytherin House used to accept all students equally regardless of blood status, and the house structure was not as rigid as it is today. In fact students from all houses had places to meet and exchange ideas. Muggle studies were actually taught by muggles or muggleborn. Dumbledore altered the history to set up the rivalries of today."

Remus shook his head, "This all makes sense." Tonks nodded in agreement as he continued, "but it still doesn't change the fact that you have to work with Riddle. How will you even contact him?"

Harry took a deep breath. He wasn't sure how they would react to the next bit of news, "Actually we already have. He's currently in one of the guesthouses working on a potion with Severus."

"Severus Snape? He's Dumbledore's spy!" Tonks exclaimed.

"He was Dumbledore's spy." Harry started explaining as he waived off their interruptions, "Look, none of us are purebloods here. Dumbledore isn't the leader of the light. He's the leader of the purebloods. The whole idea is to show that muggleborn and half bloods like Tom and me can't be trusted. In order to fight back and expose this we have to trust each other."

Remus shook his head, "It's so much to absorb at once."

Luna walked over in front of Remus and Tonks and took their hands into hers, "We know that and we would not have told you if we thought we couldn't trust you. Look into your hearts. Look into your past. Think about what you've seen and heard since you arrived and tell us what you believe."

Tonks absorbed Luna's words. She thought about the past few hours, about her thoughts last night about her life. She remembered her school days and how she kept to herself. Her mother had confided in the Headmaster when she got Tonk's letter that Nymphadora was a metamorphagus but that they wanted it kept secret. Andromeda did not want her daughter singled out. It was barely a week into school when two Slytherin sixth year boys cornered her and asked her to change for them. She spent the first few years shifting forms continuously to fool people and in the last two years started wearing the shocking hair colours and standing out once she knew she could defend herself. It was this need for self-defense that drove her to be an Auror. She never knew who revealed her secret in first year, but she was pretty sure of it now.

Remus was also going through his own soul-searching. So many events in his life now started to make sense. He remembered with bitterness how Albus had gotten James and Lily to trust Peter and suspect that he may have been the spy for Voldemort because of his condition. Albus also cited this condition whenever Remus had wanted to assume custody of Harry. Those laws regulating werewolves – Albus had done nothing in his position to stop neither them nor the amendments that made them even stricter.

Tonks answered first, "I'm with you. Thank you for trusting me enough to tell me."

Remus piped up, "Harry, you've always been like family to me. My friends risked their lives and eventually ended up dying because of this conspiracy. I cannot be anywhere in this but by your side." He stepped up to Harry and hugged him.

Harry looked at them. "So, shall we take a walk and see what Tom and Severus are up to?"

/Scene Break/

Albus walked out of the Director's office quite content. The Director had been resistant to his requests but had finally relented once he was presented with the directive from the Wizengamot and Minister of Magic. Now that the preparations had been made it was only a matter of time. By Sunday night Harry Potter would be firmly in his control once again.

Director Ragnok was relieved when the Headmaster finally left. He had never gotten along with this particular wizard since the Goblins had never bought the whole 'Leader of the Light' crap. No, there were no absolutes in the world and anyone who tried to live along those absolutes was either being deceived or was extremely deceptive. Ragnok felt pretty sure he knew which category Dumbledore fit in.

He summoned Griphook to his office and explained this unfortunate turn of events. Together they sent out all of the required notices by owl except one. That one they would deliver personally.

/Scene Break/

Harry was surprised by the appearance of Ragnok and Griphook in the entry hall just as they were about to go see Tom and Severus.

He bowed slightly, "Ragnok, Griphook, to what do I owe this unexpected pleasure?"

Ragnok bowed slightly to Harry in greeting, "We are here on both an official and unofficial capacity."

Harry smiled, "Come in then. Let's talk in the sitting room." Harry led his guests into the adjoining room and bade them to sit. Hermione came sat beside Harry – OK cuddled up beside – and Luna, Moony and Tonks also joined them.

Ragnok began, "Our official capacity is to inform you that the Black will reading is scheduled for this Sunday, July 8 at 3pm."

“Why the change?”

‘The Supreme Mugwump petitioned the Wizengamot and the Ministry of Magic to get it changed. His reason was that twofold – firstly you are officially without a guardian until one is either named in the will or by the new Lord Black. Dumbledore has petitioned to be your new guardian pending the consent of Lord Black.’

Harry was seething, “I see. The old coot is really pushing this time.”

“The second reason is that Dumbledore has received permission to insert an arranged marriage contract into the will. He convinced the Wizengamot that Sirius had been planning it with Albus before his death. Something about giving you something – or more correctly someone – to live for.”

“And just who am I supposed to marry?”

“Ginevra Weasley.”

Hermione was the first to speak up, “Harry is not going to marry Ginny!”

Harry added, “Who approved of this marriage?”

“Well, it looks like Sirius did sign the papers, however it looked like the parchment had traces of a confundus charm on it. He may have thought he was signing something else. There are also the signatures of both of Ginevra’s parents.”

“Is there any way out of it?”

“Well, the new Lord Black, is the only person who can cancel the contract since it was ratified after the last Lord Black died. Seeing as you are also a Potter, Lord Potter could cancel it as well, but officially there is no Lord Potter – yet.”

Then it dawned on Hermione. She turned to Harry, “Just think, Dumbledore does not know about the first will reading or your blood adoption. As far as he is concerned, Draco Malfoy will be the next

Lord Black. He's not worried about Lord Black disagreeing with any of his plans because you would be miserable if they went ahead and Draco would just approve them. Director Ragnok, when must the wedding take place?"

"The day following Miss Weasley's fifteenth birthday."

Hermione continued, "Just what I thought. He wanted to get you married before you turned seventeen and got the Potter inheritance when you became of age. As Lord Potter you would be able to cancel the contract."

Harry finally subdued his anger long enough to get it. "But the old coot doesn't know that I'm now Harry Potter-Black and both Lord Potter and Lord Black. Oh, this will be precious. Ragnok, can you please see to it that my emancipation, blood adoption and two sets of head-of-house papers are filed with the Ministry at ..."

Griphook spoke up, "May I suggest 2:30pm on Sunday?"

Harry smiled, "Yes, 2:30 pm sounds fine." He turned back to Hermione, "I guess Dumbledore never read my note closely. I only gave him permission to act on my behalf at the will reading on the fourteenth."

He turned towards the goblins, "Ragnok, Griphook, we have a lot of things to prepare in the next 48 hours. First of all, I know this may be asking a lot, but can we have Grimmauld Place completed by Sunday noon? I will pay the premium required and can also ask my house elves to help out if you need."

Griphook answered, "Harry, as soon as we were informed of the change, we made plans to have the work completed. It is all taken care of."

"Thank you. Ragnok, do you have a list of the people invited to the reading?"

Ragnok handed Harry the list.

Harry asked, "May I add names to this?" Ragnok nodded and Harry added a few names. He showed the rest and they nodded and smiled. "I will also come by on Sunday morning and with my decisions on what everyone on the list will receive."

Both Ragnok and Griphook smiled. Those not used to Goblin smiles usually feel a shiver run up their spines.

"One more thing before you leave. I am inviting a few friends and their families over for dinner tomorrow. I would be honoured if you would accept my invitation to join us."

Ragnok bowed, "I cannot remember the last time a wizard lord invited a goblin to a social occasion. Griphook and I will be here at 5:00."

Harry smiled, "Perfect. Thank you gentlemen."

With that the two goblins went back to the bank.

Harry talked to the rest of the people there, "Let's go see Tom and Severus. We have to plan for Sunday and we don't have much time."

A/N – There was a lot I wanted to get into this chapter so it has turned out to be the longest one to date.

Over the next two weeks, I will be away from home at a conference so I might not be updating this regularly again until mid-April. I'll try and get as many chapters done during this time as I can, but I'll be pretty busy. The next chapters will have to cover the fallout of the news, the big dinner on Saturday and, of course, the will reading.

I want to thank everyone who has sent me suggestions about characters and which side of the fence they fall on. I'm glad that you seem to be as interested in where this story is going as I am.

Chapter 14 – Oh Where Oh Where Has My Family Gone

To say the walk down to the guesthouse was tense was like saying Crabbe and Goyle were simply academically challenged. For Remus and Tonks, the reason was obvious – they were about to meet the most feared wizard in modern history face to face. It didn't help that Harry, Hermione and Luna were so blasé about it. That just made it worse. The thought that these three were under the Imperious spell had occurred to Remus several times, but that didn't seem to be the case here. Tonks and Remus had talked it over and agreed that they would overcome their fears and meet Tom Riddle.

The two of them held hands as they made their way down the path. Despite the tension Remus reflected that there was something just right about him and Tonks. He glanced over at Tonks with a slight smile and she smiled back at him and squeezed his hand tighter.

Harry looked over at Moony and Tonks and smiled. It was about time the old Marauder allowed himself to love someone. If anyone could get Moony to lighten up it would be Tonks. His brow furrowed, he too was concerned about the upcoming meeting. Severus and Tom were expecting them, but he didn't know how Moony would react to both of them in the same place. Harry sighed, this was never meant to be easy.

About halfway to the guesthouse Harry felt a presence and looked up just as Hedwig swooped down and landed on a very surprised Hermione's shoulder with a note attached to her leg. Hermione untied the note from Hedwig's leg and the owl nuzzled her and then took to the sky once more.

Hermione unrolled the note and read:

Hermione, we spoke to the prats in question and have some news. Please come by the shop as soon as you can.

Gred and Forge

PS. We had tried sending you this note this morning but our owl couldn't find you. When we came back from lunch we found Hedwig

waiting for us like she knew we had to send something. We had a very interesting lunch and now need to talk to you more than ever.

Hermione gave the short note to Harry and he read it before sharing it with the others.

Hermione looked at Harry, "I think Luna and I need to visit the twins."

Harry agreed, "Find out what's up. Be careful though."

Hermione and Luna nodded and after a quick kiss (Hermione to Harry of course) they activated their portkeys and were gone.

Harry turned to Remus and Tonks; "We can still go down to meet Tom if you wish."

Remus looked at Tonks and knew she was thinking the same thing. He looked at Harry and tried to sound as sincere as possible, "Actually Harry, we do have an Order meeting tonight and it's getting kind of late..."

Harry, just grinned a knowing grin, "In other words you want to put off meeting Tom and having to talk to Severus until later."

Tonks chuckled as the tension broke, "Exactly."

Harry chuckled as well and Moony's shoulders visibly relaxed. "Hey Moony, do you think you'll have time to go to Gringotts and take care of the Black Family Legacy for me? I know it's a lot to ask, but I wanted to get rid of anything really dark before any of them had a chance to contest the will."

Remus smiled warmly, "I've got all day tomorrow but I may need some help in order to get it done before Sunday." He looked at Tonks and raised his eyebrows in expectation.

Tonks smiled slyly, "Mr. Lupin, are you asking me out on a date? What exactly are you agreeing to do for Mr. Potter-Black?"

Remus blushed again, “Well Harry has a vault at Gringotts full of artifacts from Grimmauld Place and the Black Family vault. He wants me to look for dark items and either remove the enchantments or dispose of them if they can’t be saved.”

Tonks batted her eyelashes at him, “Why you romantic wolf. We just started going out and already you are trying to get me into a dark, secluded place and seduce me.”

Remus blushed even further and spluttered, “No. Thanks not... I mean... Oh, shit.”

Tonks couldn’t hold it and just started laughing, “Really Moony. You are sooo easy to get worked up. Of course I’ll help you.”

Harry was laughing at the exchange as well. Moony had the look of someone who knew he was beat – this time. Once he calmed down enough Harry said, “Thanks Tonks, I really appreciate it. You know, you are really good together. Moony needs to loosen up a bit and I think you are just the person to do it. I have one word of warning for you though.”

Tonks looked at Harry, “What’s that?”

Harry smiled a knowing smile, “He may appear quiet and subdued, but if you get him to loosen up you’ll awaken the Marauder within.”

Tonks paled. She had heard of the Marauders from Sirius and it just now dawned on her who she had been teasing. She gulped, “Remus, you know I was just teasing in good fun.”

Remus grinned a feral grin – he knew Harry just helped level the teasing playing field, “Of course I do dear. We should be going now don’t you think?”

Harry was still laughing as they apparated. They were going to be very good for each other.

/Scene Break/

Hermione and Luna appeared back on Diagon Alley and headed for the shop. It was late afternoon and they moved quickly trying to keep from being recognized.

As soon as they got to the shop they went in. There were a couple of customers looking at various items. One of the twins saw them and motioned them to the back room and they quickly proceeded through the store with their heads down and into the back room without being recognized.

George was waiting for them at the back, "Fred's going to take care of the shop while we talk."

Hermione and Luna noticed that there was a certain tension in the air. The twins were hardly ever this serious.

George took a deep breath, "This may come as a big shock to you, but we think our mother and Dumbledore are plotting something against Harry and the two prats are in on it."

Hermione and Luna looked shocked (or as much as they could fake it under the circumstances). George went on, "We need to get to Harry. There's something strange happening. Ron and Ginny are blaming him for the fight at the Ministry and Sirius' death and Mum is even calling him the next Dark Lord." George then proceeded to tell them about the rest of their visit to the Burrow. He also told them about what Percy had found out at the Ministry.

Hermione got a quizzical look in her face and asked, "Percy? I thought he wasn't talking to anyone in the family."

At this George lightened up and smiled. He told them about Audrey and her affect on his tight-assed brother. He also told them about Molly's reaction to the news.

Hermione shot a knowing glance at Luna. The younger girl asked, "What do you and Fred think about all this?"

"We always thought that there was something fundamentally wrong with our world. The lines between light and dark are too stark and

besides, we recognized a long time ago that Purebloods tend to stick together when push comes to shove regardless of which side they are supposedly on.”

Luna continued, “But aren’t you and Fred Purebloods?”

“Yeah, but like our parents – well, at least our Dad – we don’t care about blood lines. We need your help to warn Harry though. He’s been like another brother to us and if Dumb-door and our Mum are plotting against him then we want to be on his side.”

Hermione asked, “Why?”

“Because we owe a lot to him. He’s been there for us and if the world is conspiring against Harry Potter, the world is going to be wrong and we want to be on the right side.”

Luna looked at Hermione and nodded. Hermione asked, “George, when does your shop close?”

He looked at his watch – it was 4:30, “In half an hour, why?”

“Can we come back at 5:15? There’s someone we want you to talk to about this.”

“OK, is it anyone we know?”

“You’ll see.”

The girls left through the back door and went back to the Manor.

/Scene Break/

Arthur left work early and used the floo to head back home. He had been unable to concentrate on work all afternoon. Something was happening to his family and he had no idea what was causing it – or worse still – how to stop it. Percy’s and the Twins’ experiences with Molly and his two youngest children troubled him deeply.

Arthur paused; he was struggling with an internal conflict. Part of him wanted to confront Molly and get a direct explanation for her behaviour. Another part of him was raising a warning – it was warning him to find out more before confronting Molly. This hurt him even more. For over 30 years he had been able to share everything with Molly – they raised seven children together, survived Voldemort's first rise and fall and lived in a home full of love.

A home full of love.

That's all that Arthur ever wanted from life. He considered himself the most blessed and successful of men. Riches, possessions, or a well-paying prestigious job were fleeting – the love of a family wasn't. Or so he thought.

Was it all an illusion? Tears began to fall from Arthur's eyes. The possibility that his strong and happy family was a sham tore at his heart. Arthur looked at the Burrow and for the first time in his adult life he did not want to go home. The realization hit him even harder.

Hanging his head and with slumped shoulders, Arthur turned around and walked back up the drive away from his home and apparated away.

/Scene Break/

Hermione and Luna arrived back at the Manor and found Harry in the library.

Hermione ran over to him and gave him a quick hug and kiss. "Harry, you need to talk to the Twins. We think they'll join us." They filled him in on the discussions they had with the twins.

Harry was excited. The Twins would be incredible allies. He had always admired their brilliance and their ability to disobey authority without being caught.

At exactly 5:15 Hermione and Luna appeared in the alley behind the shop. They knocked on the door and were let in by one of the Twins.

George started, "I've told Fred about our conversation. I thought you were bringing someone else with you."

Luna said, "We wanted to be sure that you both were sure about what George told us before."

Fred nodded, "We've seen patterns for a few years now. Something is up and Harry's in the middle of it."

George agreed, "And we both know that if Harry is on one side of a situation he's the one to trust."

Fred finished very matter-of-factly, "He's one of the few people who has never given us a reason not to trust him."

Luna nodded, "Just one last thing. We'll need a wizard's oath not to reveal what we will be talking about and the identity of the other person who is just outside that door with anyone unless that person allows it."

The Twins looked a little apprehensive but provided the oath.

Hermione smiled and walked over to the door. She opened it slightly and said, "You can come in now."

The Twins looked in anticipation as the door opened and Harry walked in with his trademark smirk on his face. Anticipation turned to glee as they rushed forward and enveloped him in a hug.

Their seriousness briefly gone they lapsed into Twin speak. "You sneaky bugger."

"Here we were worried about"

"you being locked away"

"and you're able to slip out"

"from under the Order's noses."

Harry just laughed, "Hi guys. Sorry for the secrecy and everything but I really have to be careful about who knows what I'm up to this summer."

"Gred, I'm so proud!"

"As am I Forge."

"At least some of our influence"

"rubbed off on the younger generation."

"Even Hermione and Luna are"

"pranksters at heart."

The Twins invited them to come upstairs to their flat. Harry and Hermione sat down on the couch absentmindedly holding hands. The Twins noticed immediately.

"Merlin!"

"It's about time you two saw in each other"

"What everyone else around you has seen for years."

"Except maybe ickle Ronniekins"

"And Gin-Gin"

"And Mum"

The twins got uncharacteristically quiet and seemed lost in thought for a second.

Harry started to say something and hesitated. "Guys..."

Fred and George suddenly sprung from their seats and ran into another room. They came back out moments later studying a large piece of parchment talking to each other

“So, it’s Flitwick?”

“Looks like it.”

“Merlin it was up to 75 galleons.”

Hermione looked irritated. She furrowed her brow and said, “What’s with the parchment and what does Professor Flitwick and 75 galleons have to do with anything?”

Fred looked up, “What? Oh, Sorry.”

“We were just looking”

“At the Harry and Hermione”

“Pool from Hogwarts.”

“Professor Flitwick won.”

Hermione looked scandalized, “The professors were in on it as well?”

“Well, not all of them”

“Snape never entered”

“Yes, he did dear brother, right here”

“Oh, yeah. Well, I’m sure McGonagall and Dumbledore never entered.”

“True, quite true.”

Harry and Hermione looked at each other and just shook their heads again, “We are pretty dense,” she said.

Harry wanted to get back to why they really came over. “Guys, did you mean what you told Hermione and Luna? We could really use

your help, but it means keeping secrets from everyone we don't trust explicitly. That will probably include your family or at least part of it."

"Harry,"

"We would have never"

"lived as long as we have"

"if our family knew"

"even a fraction"

"of what we have done." George finished and both twins had huge grins on their faces. They seemed to be drawn off again. Harry thought they were probably reliving some of their best exploits. He took out a book and added their names to it.

That seemed to stir the Twins out of their reverie. They both looked at Harry quizzically with furrowed brows. Harry smiled at them knowingly, "Can you guys apparate there yourselves?"

They nodded enthusiastically as Harry continued; "Well then, we'll see you there shortly."

With a small movement, Hermione, Luna and Harry disappeared.

"Gred, I think I'm going to like this turn of events."

"So am I Forge, so am I."

They stood up in unison and were gone from the flat with a loud crack.

/Scene Break/

The Transfiguration classroom at Hogwarts was the temporary meeting place of the esteemed Order of the Phoenix since Grimmauld Place was no longer guaranteed to be secure. Even Albus himself refused to go into the house until it's new owner was determined. The house on Grimmauld – much like the one on Privet

Drive – was under constant surveillance. Ever since Sirius had died nothing had been detected entering or leaving the house.

Remus fought down a smirk as ‘Dung delivered this news. The Goblins really knew how to keep things quiet.

Moody reported that nothing much had happened at Privet Drive either. Neither Dumbledore nor Moody let the rest of the Order know about their last encounter with Harry. Since then the boy had been keeping away from the windows, but they could see movement and the lights and TV being used.

Remus knew he had a part he had to continue to play for now, “Albus, can’t we at least visit Harry? He must be lonely and still grieving for Sirius. It’s not right to leave him locked up like that.”

“Remus Harry needs to be left alone with his own thoughts right now. The best way for him to deal with this and emerge stronger is for him to find it within himself to overcome the grief. I will be checking up on him periodically to measure his progress. It’s really for the best. Molly, perhaps in a week or two Ginevra and Ronald could go see him for a few hours.”

Molly brightened up, “Of course Albus, I’m sure Harry would appreciate it.”

Dumbledore had a twinkle in his eye and Remus was really starting to hate that. He didn’t let the subject of Harry drop just yet, “Is Harry at least going to be at Sirius’ will reading? I got a notice from Gringotts today for 3pm on Sunday.”

The annoying twinkle continued, “Alas it is too dangerous for Harry to be allowed to go. I have discussed it with him in depth and he agreed for me to represent him at the will reading.”

Remus responded, “Well, if Harry’s OK with it then who am I to argue,” while at the same time he thought, “In-depth? That discussion had as much depth as your investigation of Sirius’ guilt the first time around. Can you even smell the shit you’re shoveling old man?”

Dumbledore continued the meeting. “Kingsley, have there been any new attacks?”

“No, Voldemort’s forces have been quiet since the Ministry attack. You think that they would have become more active.”

If it was possible, the twinkle got even worse; “Severus is away with Voldemort for about two weeks. He told me that Voldemort requested his company. I do not, however, know the nature of the journey. Severus also told me that he gave others some assignments but he didn’t have any details. I would assume that he is planning something but it won’t take place until after he’s back.”

“The last item I would like to mention tonight is the reading of Sirius Black’s will. For those who may not be aware, Sirius was the Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Black and did not have any direct heirs. Without a direct heir, the next male Black in line is Draco Malfoy – he will inherit whatever Sirius has not left to anyone else. Who has received a notice to attend the will reading?”

Around the table, Remus, Tonks, and Molly raised their hands. Molly spoke up, “Notices came for Ron, Ginny, Arthur and myself.”

Tonks added, “I’m sure my mother and father were sent notices as well.”

Albus nodded, “We will have to see who else received notices however I have my suspicions. Alas, are there any other issues anyone wishes to discuss?”

Elphias Doge spoke up, “Albus, what is happening to the Death Eaters captured in the Ministry?”

Albus responded gloomily, “I have been trying to get them securely sent to Azkaban, however Cornelius is adamant they be held at the Ministry until they are given trials. Those will take place sometime in the next two weeks. With Voldemort away I’m not as concerned that the other Death Eaters will mount a rescue mission, however that is not completely out of the realm of possibility. However since the

battle at the Ministry it is nearly impossible for us to place our own people in surveillance positions there.”

With that the meeting concluded and everyone started to leave. Remus was the first to leave and Tonks took a bit of time before she followed.

Albus walked over to Molly, “Molly where is Arthur tonight?”

Molly shrugged her shoulders, “I’m not sure. He may be working late or spending time with Percy.”

Albus nodded and subtly looked around to ensure no one was listening, “Please let me know if anything out of the ordinary happens.”

Molly just nodded and left.

Albus headed back to his office. The plan was coming together. There were just two potential loose ends. Molly was keeping tabs on one; Albus would have to take care of the other.

/Scene Break/

Molly used the floo in Minerva’s office to get back to the Burrow. When she got back Ron and Ginny were eating popcorn and playing chess in the kitchen. Arthur was still nowhere to be found.

This was not supposed to happen. “Damn that Percy!” she thought. “Why did he have to show up now? The plan is just falling into place. We’ve got to get Harry married off to Ginny and then I don’t care what Arthur does – I’ll have what I need.”

She wondered out loud, “Where could your father have gotten to?”

/Scene Break/

Arthur had spent most of the evening at one of his and Molly’s favourite place when they were at school. It was a small clearing in the woods just south of Hogsmeade. They had discovered this place

in his fifth year and would just spend time together there alone during Hogsmeade weekends.

Arthur had always been a quiet boy – heart of gold, kind, loyal – he always wondered why he hadn't been a Hufflepuff. He was also always tinkering with things. His half-blood and muggle-born friends always remembered Arthur as the boy who was obsessed with learning about everything muggle.

He remembered when he first noticed Molly. He was in fourth year – she was in third. There was just something about her that made her the most beautiful girl in the school to him. He tried to find out everything about her. All of his friends said she kept to her close-knit friends and that she had a number of friends in Slytherin. This struck Arthur as odd since she was a Gryffindor. She didn't seem to notice him at all until near the end of the year.

/Flashback/

Arthur was sitting at the Gryffindor table just after exams. He was deep in thought trying to figure out how muggles managed to get their machines to fly. Suddenly there was a sound of a throat clearing and someone had said something to him. He looked up and saw the girl of his dreams.

"I asked if this seat was taken."

"Oh. Oh no. Feel free to sit here." Arthur was starting to sweat.

"You're name's Arthur Weasley right?"

"Yes, and you are Molly Prewitt?"

"Correct."

They continued small talk through lunch. After that they started sitting together more often and talking about a wide variety of topics. To Arthur's joy they became fast friends.

The next year, Molly stopped hanging around with her friends from Slytherin as much and spent more and more of her free time with Arthur. When the first Hogsmeade weekend rolled around, Arthur got up the nerve to ask her out on a date and she accepted. After a few butterbeers at the tavern (where Molly insisted on getting two of the rounds herself) and a trip to Honeydukes (he bought her a slab of her favourite chocolate) they decided to go out for a walk. Arthur was in heaven, all he could think about was this beautiful redhead he was holding hands with.

When they found the clearing they sat down side-by-side and talked until later afternoon. As he helped her up, he found himself face to face with her. As he looked into her eyes he saw a strange look but he quickly forgot about it as she leaned forward and kissed him. The kiss literally blew his mind. After that all he could think about was Molly. They were inseparable from then on.

/End Flashback/

Arthur sat in silence, tears rolling down his face. He needed to talk to someone – but whom could he trust with this? Certainly not Dumbledore. He thought for a while and realized whom he had to talk to.

Composing himself he quickly cleaned himself up and apparated out of the clearing.

/Scene Break/

Back at Potter Manor, Harry and the girls had just finished explaining to Fred and George about the Conspiracy and the ancient prophecy. They had listened intently and had not interrupted with anything but relevant and pointed questions. They even seemed to take the news about Tom and Severus in stride.

Harry finished, “Guys, I want you to know that what we told you tonight can get you and us killed if anyone involved in the conspiracy suspects we know. If you want out you can apparate back to your shop and I’ll take your names out of the book – You won’t remember a thing about the Manor or what went on here.”

Fred got up and walked over to Harry, "Harry, we consider you and Hermione like a brother and sister. All of you took a big risk this evening and showed a lot of trust in the two of us. We are honoured that you did."

George came over and continued, "Fred and I have suspected that something was fishy with the wizarding world for a long time but we couldn't put all the pieces together. You did that for us tonight. Harry, Hermione, Luna, I speak for both of us when I say the we will join you."

Hermione jumped up and hugged them both. "Welcome on board. These rings are act like portkeys but can go through wards. You just have to activate them and they will bring you here to our safe house."

Harry jumped up, "Now, I don't want to sound like Ron, but who is up for a late dinner? You guys are welcome to stay here tonight if you want. I haven't seen Severus or Tom all day but it's pretty late now. We should go down and see them in the morning before our guests show up.

As they were sitting down to eat Luna looked at everyone and said, "Now how are we going to approach Percy and Arthur?"

Before anyone could answer, Jeeves popped in and whispered to Harry. He looked up, "We have visitors."

They all got up and went into the entry hall where two figures were standing and looking around.

Hermione's eyes went wide, "Mom! Dad! What are you doing here?"

A/N – I'm going to try and keep the installments coming regularly again. Please R&R. I really appreciate the feedback and suggestions to help make this a better tale.

Chapter 15 – Meet the Parents

Tom and Severus had worked through the day on the potion to reintegrate the horcruxes. The work was exacting and the two of them lost themselves in the preparation only speaking to ensure that their tasks remained coordinated.

By late afternoon, the ingredients had been prepared which meant they could start brewing. Tom found himself in an unfamiliar role as he acceded the lead to Severus since the younger was a more adept Potions Master. They continued to work silently as the ingredients were added and checks were made along the way to ensure that the mixture was being prepared correctly.

Finally the last of the ingredients was added and the two had a chance to relax. The potion still had to be watched and stirred at precise times over the next 48 hours, but it was for all intents and purposes complete.

At their request, the house elves had prepared some dinner for them. As they sat and ate, Severus' curiosity got the better of them and he got up the courage to do something he would not have even considered a week ago – he engaged Tom Riddle in conversation.

“Tom – you know it's still very strange for me to call you that – what do you make of all of this? I mean, I find it hard to believe that you are the same person who for the past few decades has gone by the name of Voldemort.” He was visibly startled as Tom's eyes turned red and his voice became the Dark Lord's again.

“I am still here Severus. I still feel all the hate, and loathing that I have had for a long time. People will die by my hand as I seek retribution for what they have done to me,” he said in a very calm manner which Snape was used to – it made his skin crawl and for the first time in a few days he was once again scared of the man in front of him.

Voldemort continued, “However now things have changed. Instead of subjecting the world in general to my wrath, I now have a focus for my hatred. The wizards who guided me down the path that resulted in

who I am will pay.” With that he relaxed his features and his eyes lost their red tones.

“Severus, I choose not to show myself as Voldemort right now because I have my new allies and it is for them that I am repressing my Dark Lord image. I find I have no anger towards those of us here and this allows me to be the person you see.”

Severus relaxed and leaned forward again to continue his meal. He looked up to see Tom chuckling.

“It’s still a strange sight to see you laughing in an amused sort of way. I’m only used to your evil laugh.”

“Well, I’m thinking about my first two plans for payback. You remember I called Bellatrix and young Draco to me the day we left?” Severus nodded slowly.

“Well, I gave Draco a mission to redeem his family and earn his Dark Mark. I told him he had to kill Dumbledore.”

Severus looked at the other man with a sense of shock. He slowly started smiling, “How did Draco take his assignment.”

“Outwardly he took it very well but I read his emotions. He was scared shitless at the prospect of going up against Dumbledore. He also tried to bribe me.”

“How so?”

“By telling me that he would swear the fealty of the House of Black to me when he became the Head.” Tom went on to explain how Draco intended to make good his offer.

Severus tried to maintain a straight face but burst out laughing, “That arrogant fool. He’s even more arrogant and stupid than Lucius.”

Tom smiled an evil smile, “Exactly.”

Severus managed to calm himself down after a few minutes and asked, "What about Bella?"

"I asked her to come up with a detailed plan on how to take over the Ministry with the express instructions to do it quietly and covertly."

Snape looked like he was about to explode again, "Quietly and covertly? Bella?"

"Exactly. And we both pretty much know what she'll end up doing."

With that answer Snape gave a good demonstration of what people in future years would describe as ROTFLOL.

/Scene Break/

Bellatrix LeStrange was bored and frustrated and every Death Eater knew that a bored and frustrated Bellatrix was a dangerous, psychotic Bellatrix. Well, actually Bellatrix was dangerous and psychotic most of the time but if she was bored and frustrated it was even worse.

Bellatrix was widely regarded by most Death Eaters, most non-Death Eaters and even herself as one of Voldemort's inner circle, which was true – to a point. Voldemort kept her close and under the illusion she was 'in the know' so that he could maintain some type of control over her. She was a weapon that he unleashed if he wanted to create widespread fear and destruction. This was in contrast to Lucius Malfoy and Severus Snape who were more strategic and were used where secrecy and precision were the order of the day.

Bellatrix had not been careful in her study of so-called Dark Magic and had lost her mind in the process. Voldemort, Snape and Malfoy knew that Bellatrix was massively unstable. That is why The Dark Lord only let her lead 'Scorched Earth' missions and also why Malfoy (and, by extension, his true leader Dumbledore) did not trust her enough to let her in on the conspiracy.

Bellatrix herself was not aware of her limitations. So when her Lord gave her the task of planning a subtle take over of the Ministry she was honoured to get such an assignment. She initially thought of the

team she would assemble, the plans they would draw up. She would then augment that with intelligence from their moles in the Ministry. She had seen Lucius and her Lord do this many times before. Her plan would be the best the Dark Lord had ever seen.

That was her original idea.

The problem was that Bella couldn't plan her way in or out of anywhere if the plan didn't include destroying everything in her path. After a few days of trying to come up with a plan, she had achieved four things:

All of the Death Eaters in the compound were very, very busy doing anything they could so that they didn't have time to help Bella. She had already gotten frustrated and killed the three who didn't know any better.

The Death Eater moles in the Ministry were all in silent mode. They passed word back to Bella that it was too dangerous to talk because all of them were suddenly under surveillance.

There were yards and yards of ruined parchment. Multiple plans started and abandoned.

Bella was getting more and more frustrated. The parts of her brain she was trying to exercise were completely out of shape and the anarchist part of her brain was screaming to go for a walk.

Bella let out a frustrated scream. This managed to clear out any part of the compound within 300 yards of her room.

She needed Lucius or Severus. The problem was that the latter was with her master and the former was a 'guest' of the Ministry aurors. However, the Dark Lord did not forbid her from freeing Lucius and the others. Bella's maniacal smile returned.

It was time for a jailbreak and it had to be done before the Dark Lord returned.

/Scene Break/

Draco Malfoy stared up at his ceiling for the second night in a row. He had received good news today. For some reason the Will reading for Sirius Black had been moved to Sunday. That meant he would be the new Lord Black within a few days. This gave him some hope; "Perhaps the Dark Lord will allow me to enlist help with my task once I swear the Black Family to his service."

With that slightly comforting thought, Draco tried to get some sleep, but his brain still would not let go of the thought, "I still have to kill Dumbledore."

/Scene Break/

Elsewhere a lone figure walked up to a small cottage. Arthur had come here hoping for some shelter and a sympathetic ear to talk to. As he knocked on the door, he was questioned and after he answered a pair of decidedly female arms enveloped him in a hug. He returned the hug and went inside.

/Scene Break/

Hermione's eyes went wide, "Mom! Dad! What are you doing here?"

The man and the woman recognized their daughter just before she enveloped them in a hug.

Dan and Jane were relieved to see their daughter. This was the first time they had experienced a mode of magical transportation and they had found it frightening and exhilarating at the same time.

Dan looked at his daughter with a newfound respect for her world. "We were just following your instructions." He was about to continue when he noticed the others looking at them.

Jane noticed his glances and said to her daughter, "Honey would you introduce us to your friends?"

Hermione just shook her head, "Where are my manners? Mom, Dad, please meet Fred and George Weasley," the twins bowed, "Luna

Lovegood,” Luna came and shook hands with the couple, “and our host and my boyfriend,” – Hermione really enjoyed that last part – “Harry Potter. Everyone, these are my parents, Dan and Jane.”

Harry came forward and went to shake Jane’s hand. Much to his surprise his handshake was rebuffed and he found himself in a hug instead. He backed away and went to shake Dan’s hand. He found a rather civil handshake and a piercing glare from Hermione’s father. Dan did not say anything to him, but the look said, “We need to talk.” Harry nodded to the man to let him know the message was received and then Tom said, “Thank you for welcoming us to your home.”

Everyone crowded around the Grangers and started asking them questions. Before it got out of hand Harry spoke up, “Mr. and Mrs. Granger, we were just sitting down to a late dinner. Would you like to join us? We can talk over a good meal.”

The Grangers nodded appreciatively. Jane answered, “Thank you. We were just preparing dinner when we had to leave rather suddenly. Oh, I think I speak for Dan when I say that you should please call us Dan and Jane. Mr. and Mrs. Granger is too formal for our daughter’s friends.”

Harry looked at Dan and realized that Dan wasn’t ready to be on a first name basis with his daughter’s boyfriend, but he nodded to the others as well.

They went into the kitchen and sat down for dinner. Jeeves had watched the encounter in the entrance hall and had already set an additional two places.

They all sat down and started eating dinner. After a bit of small talk Hermione looked at her parents and asked, “So... what happened?”

Jane looked around the table and started to tell the tale.

/Flashback/

Jane and Dan were in their kitchen preparing dinner. All of a sudden both felt a strange tingling like a static charge just went through the

whole house. They shrugged it off and went back to their preparations when they heard a knock at the door.

Thinking nothing of it, Dan went to the door and when he opened it, he was surprised to see the elderly witch from Hermione's school. She had come to them on Hermione's eleventh birthday and was the one who informed them Hermione was a witch and spent a few hours with them explaining everything and answering their questions. She had also informed the Granger's of their daughter's injuries after the fight in the Ministry the previous month.

"Good evening Mr. Granger. I was wondering if I could have a word with you, Mrs. Granger and Hermione."

Dan found his voice, "Professor, it is a pleasure to see you again. Won't you come in?" He led her to their sitting room. "Let me just go get Jane." He disappeared and returned a few moments later with Jane.

Jane hid her feeling of unease well, "Professor, it's nice to see you again. To what do we owe this visit?"

"I am here to talk to the two of you and your daughter on a matter of great importance. In fact, the Headmaster of Hogwarts will be here shortly as well." She glanced back towards the door.

Dan and Jane took the opportunity to share a glance as the elderly witch's attention was elsewhere. They were both thinking about the warning Hermione had given them. At that moment there was a knock at the door. Dan went to answer it and opened the door.

Before him stood a strange old man with a long white beard and bizarre looking robes, "Mr. Granger, " said the man with a twinkle in his eyes, "I am Albus Dumbledore, Headmaster of Hogwarts."

Dan smiled politely, "Of course! Professor McGonagall mentioned you were on your way. Won't you please come in?"

He led the Headmaster into the sitting room and Albus took the seat next to Minerva.

Jane said, "Hermione is not here right now but we are expecting her home shortly. Would you like some tea while we wait?"

Dumbledore looked up at them with a twinkle in his eye and nodded gratefully, "Yes, some tea would be very nice right now thank you."

Jane motioned to Dan and the two of them went down toward the kitchen. Dan tapped her on the shoulder once and silently headed back toward the sitting room. He had been in the SAS in his 20s and still knew how to be completely silent.

He got close to the room and was able to hear the two professors talking quietly.

"Albus, do you think they suspect anything."

"What can they suspect? We are just here to visit Hermione."

"How are you going to keep her away from the Will reading?"

"I'm going to put them under the Imperious for a few days and then Obliviate their memory. I just can't risk having her at the reading. She's too close to the Boy and I can't control her."

That was all Dan needed to hear. He silently made his way back to the kitchen almost scaring Jane as he snuck in.

"We need to go now. I'm not sure what he was talking about, but it did not sound good for us or Hermione."

They quietly opened the door from the Kitchen to the back yard and activated the rings. They disappeared into the night just as the kettle started to boil.

/End Flashback/

As the Grangers finished their tale, everyone sat around the table lost in their own thoughts.

Hermione was seething and was the first to speak, "That meddling old bastard. Do you realize what he wanted to do?" Dan and Jane shook their heads slowly.

"First of all, that static charge you felt was most likely Dumbledore setting up wards," she saw their confusion, "think of it as a dampening or interference field to prevent all forms of magical travel. The only thing I know of that would go through those types of wards are these rings and necklaces which allow us to come here. So, in other words he was trying to trap us there."

"And the spells they were talking about! The Imperious curse is a form of mind control. Dumbledore is powerful enough that he would have had complete control over our actions for at least a couple of days. You probably guessed the Obliviate spell would allow him to modify our memories so that we would not know exactly what had happened while he tried to control us. In fact, he would not only have been able to erase any of our memories but also plant false ones instead." Her parents were shocked as they realized what sort of situation they had escaped.

Hermione was far from done with her rant, "What's even worse is that McGonagall was in on the whole thing and was a willing participant. I TRUSTED HER!! I always believed that she was on our side and looked out for her students. She was going to help Dumbledork do that to us?"

The shock of being betrayed by someone she trusted so implicitly was too much. She got up and ran out of the room crying. Jane and Luna quickly followed her. Harry got up to go after her as well, but sat right back down as his eyes met Dan's. The twins having seen a look like that once or twice before, quietly excused themselves with mischievous grins on their faces and bade everyone good night as they went to their rooms.

Harry looked at Dan.

Dan glared at Harry.

Harry gulped.

Dan was quite enjoying this. He spoke softly but firmly, "Now Harry, Hermione tells me the two of you are dating?"

Harry thought of how he should answer very carefully. He ran a number of scenarios through his mind and settled on strong and sincere, "Yes, we are."

"So is this something serious, or just a summer fling?"

"I have very strong feelings for her and she does for me. We have been best friends since first year and I'm not sure I would even be alive today without her help. I can tell you one thing for certain Mr. Granger, I would willingly give up my life for her and please believe me when I tell you, we've been in situations where I had to seriously consider that scenario."

"Do you love her?"

"I'm not sure. I think so, but you have to understand my background. I was orphaned when I was one year old and until I started at Hogwarts I lived in a household devoid of love. My family – if you can call them that – ensured that I was treated more as a servant than a child. Until I met Hermione and Ron, I had never had any friends. Any time I tried to make them, my cousin scared them off. In short, I'm not sure if I love Hermione because I am not sure of what love is and I hope to figure it out someday."

That was not the type of answer Dan was expecting. He saw the strength of character and will in the boy before him. This boy answered his questions directly and honestly. He could see why his daughter had fallen for him. There was much more to Harry Potter than met the eye.

"Harry, please call me Dan," he smiled warmly as the boy visibly relaxed, "let me tell you a story."

“Harry, our daughter was always a bit of a recluse. She always acted older than her age and was able to read by the time she was three. Her thirst for knowledge and overwhelming willingness to share that knowledge got her the reputation of being a know-it-all and the other kids her age either couldn’t or didn’t want to relate to her. She grew up very lonely and turned to her books for solace.”

“When we got her Hogwarts letter and she found out she was a witch, she was the happiest I had ever seen her since she was a baby. She immediately begged us to get her as many books on the subject as we could so that she could fit in to the Magical world.”

“When she started at Hogwarts she wrote to us often, but in those first few months we could see that she was as alone in the Wizarding world as she was in the non-magical one. We had hoped she would be able to start fresh and things would change for her.”

“Then in November, she started writing about her new friends Harry and Ron – well, mostly Harry. Since then we have seen our brilliant shy girl grow up into a self-confident, brilliant young woman. Harry you don’t know how happy we’ve been to see this change in our daughter. From what I understand, you are primarily responsible for this. Now that I’ve met you and talked to you I can begin to understand what she sees in you.”

Harry thought about what Dan had said and relaxed some more with a slight knowing smile on his face, “Thank you Dan.”

Dan got up from the table saying, “Let’s go see where the women got themselves to.”

Harry got up and led Dan to the Library where they found Hermione, Jane and Luna talking quietly. Harry went over and gave Hermione a hug, “Everything OK?”

She smiled as she hugged him back enjoying the feeling of security she felt, “Yeah, I mean some part of me knew it would come to this, just realizing it is a bit shocking.”

Harry looked up, "You must all be quite tired. Dan, Jane you are welcome to stay in one of the guesthouses on the Manor grounds. Hermione picked one out for your family."

Jane sighed, "A good night's sleep is just what I need right now. But we didn't bring anything with us."

Harry summoned Jeeves. He addressed the Grangers, "With your sudden departure it may not be safe for you to return to your house for at least a few days. If you can give Jeeves a list of the things you need, with your permission he can take some elves to your house and quickly get them for you. The elves have their own magic that can't be detected by wizards."

The three Grangers gave the elf their lists and Jeeves disappeared immediately afterwards.

"Great! Now, I'll show you to your accommodations. Luna, do you want to come along for the walk?"

Luna shook her head. "No, I think I'll go home to Daddy. We'll see you tomorrow."

They all bade Luna a good night and she disappeared from the Manor. It was a warm moonlit night as they made their way to the guesthouse. Harry and Hermione were holding hands and Dan and Jane followed them. The two older Grangers looked on with the joy a parent feels seeing their child obviously quite happy. When they came to the cottage by the pond, Jane gasped.

"Harry, this is beautiful. We've always dreamt of a place like this."

"Hermione told me. I want the two of you to know that you are always welcome here. Please consider this cottage your home away from home."

Jane came over and hugged him and Dan shook his hand and clasped his shoulder.

The two of them headed over to the door of the cottage. As Jane was going inside, Dan turned around and said, "Hermione aren't you coming."

Before Hermione could answer, Jane pulled Dan into the guesthouse saying, "I think they want a few minutes alone."

Harry and Hermione held hands facing each other. "You sure you're OK?" Harry asked.

"Never better." With that both of them grinned stupidly at each other and giggled.

"What did my father want to say to you?"

"He just wanted to make sure his daughter was with someone who cared about her. I convinced him I do. I don't think there is anyone I care about more in this world."

He tried to say something else but all other attempts at talking were stifled by the pair of exquisite lips that met his. Harry lost himself in the kiss and the arms that had wrapped around him like a boa constrictor. When they finally broke apart for air they were both flushed and breathing heavily.

Hermione hugged him tightly once more and whispered "Good night my love," into his ear before she skipped down to the cottage to join her parents.

Harry just stood there stunned. First the kiss and embrace that felt like she was trying to fuse them into one being. Then there were her parting words – "my love". "She loves me?" he thought. No one had ever said that to him.

"She Loves Me!"

And what was that skipping all about? He had never seen Hermione skip. He'd ask her about it in the morning.

/Scene Break/

Albus Dumbledore was not in a good mood. The Grangers had disappeared out the back of their house and a search of the neighbourhood turned up nothing. Albus and Minerva had investigated the kitchen when the kettle kept whistling. They had turned off the stove and noticed the open door.

Minerva had thought perhaps that Death Eaters had taken the couple but Dumbledore thought this unlikely. He had erected the wards around the property and they would have alerted him to any magical presence. Besides, there was no way portkeys or apparition could have been used and the Granger residence was not part of the floo network.

No, they had to have run out. He posted a 24hr watch on the house for when they returned. He needed to get control of Hermione.

He knew that she was loyal to Harry and it would not do to have her at the Will reading. There was no telling how she would react and he could not afford her to learn information that might get back to Harry. Dumbledore was sure of the wards around Privet Drive, but he had to admit that if anyone could find away around them that damn mudblood would be at the top of the list.

Dumbledore thought about the extra wards he had erected around the Granger house, the surveillance and the teams he had out looking for them. "They can't hide forever," he thought.

/Scene Break/

Back at the Burrow the two youngest Weasleys were having a hard time sleeping.

Ginny had her eyes closed and was picturing her storybook wedding to Harry Potter. She had already picked out the dress she would wear and what her five bridesmaids and maid of honour would be wearing too. She even had the many important details sorted like where all the reporters and press cameras would be situated to capture her in all her glory as she married the boy-who-lived. It was perfect. She had planned everything out and in a few days she would be betrothed.

Nothing escaped her planning – right down to the dress she would wear to his funeral.

Ron was thinking about Hermione. She might be a mudblood, but damn she was good looking. His mother, Headmaster and him had even planned out which potions he would slip her next year. There was the love potion of course, but there were also the potions that would dampen her magic and her mind. After all, his mudblood girlfriend couldn't be seen as better than him.

/Scene Break/

Harry didn't feel like sleeping so he decided to check in on Severus and Tom.

He knocked on the door of their guesthouse and Severus answered and invited him inside.

"Harry, we expected you much sooner," Tom said as he looked up from the potion.

Harry sat down with them and told them about the day and their multiple surprise visitors. When he finished telling them the Granger's story Tom told him, "There's nothing to worry about. Albus may get suspicious but when he finds out about your inheritance on Sunday he will just realize that they are with you. There is nothing yet to make him suspect anything else."

"Yeah, I guess you're right. There's just so many things happening and I don't want to play our hand too soon."

Harry asked them how the potions was coming along and was delighted to hear it was almost completed. By this time his exhaustion was catching up to him and he bid them a good night and used his ring to transport him back to the Manor house.

/Scene Break/

Remus Lupin was having a sleepless night. This wasn't due to any worries for himself or anyone else. No, the cause of his sleepless

night was the young metamorph currently sharing his bed. It was going to be a long, enjoyable night.

Remus thought wistfully, "It's a good thing I have the stamina of a werewolf."

A/N – Well, what do you think? Please keep the reviews coming. There are so many things going on in the story. Right now I'm not sure who else will be joining the heirs of the founders. Neville and his Gran are already givens and probably Luna's dad as well. Arthur's and the rest of the Weasleys' stories are still evolving.

A few people have mentioned Hagrid. Yes, he is a mixed blood, but he is blindly loyal to Dumbles. I'm not sure how or when he will fit in. Any ideas?

Chapter 16 – I, Sirius Black

Sunday, July 8, 2pm

Harry and Hermione were in a meeting with Griphook and Ragnok going over the last-minute details before the will reading. The beneficiaries were due to be arriving soon and Harry wanted to make sure everything was perfect. Harry's Head of House and emancipation papers were complete and ready to be forwarded to the Ministry in about half an hour.

Ragnok was ecstatic. There hadn't been a will reading like this in living memory. He wanted to savour every moment of it. What was especially sweet was that Dumbledore and most of the purebred wizards treated Goblins like inferior creatures. He loved being able to catch them in their little webs of lies and deceit.

In contrast, Harry and his friends treated everyone with respect and dignity. Last Evening's dinner party proved it to him once again.

Ragnok and Griphook arrived at Harry's Manor at 5pm for dinner. Harry and Hermione greeted them warmly. They brought them into the sitting room where most of the guests were mingling and introduced them as friends.

Throughout the time before dinner, Harry's guests took time to talk with the Goblins and engaged both of them in conversation. The Grangers were very curious about the Bank and Goblin culture and asked a number of questions while remaining polite and respectful. The twin Weasleys – Fred and George – asked his and Griphook's advice on how to invest the profits from their business. Griphook knew that Harry had an equity stake in their business so he set up a meeting with them on Tuesday to discuss their options more thoroughly.

Once they were called to dinner, Harry's true nature came through. First of all, Harry had arranged for charmed seating for the two goblins so that they could sit at the same level at the table as the humans. Secondly, Harry had procured fine Goblin wine for the dinner and had the elves prepare their meals to be more palatable to

Goblins. Ragnok had been invited to Wizard events before, but never had his Wizard hosts taken the trouble to consider that the Goblin palate was different from that of a human. So instead of politely picking their way thorough a human meal, Ragnok and Griphook were truly able to experience the culinary delights of the Potter elves as much and the rest of the wizards and witches around the table. In fact, Ragnok was sure it was one of the best meals he had ever eaten.

That's what made this Wizard different. It didn't matter if you were a joke shop owner, a teenager in school, a muggle dentist, a house elf or even the Head of the Goblin Nation – if Harry Potter considered you a friend then he would treat you with the respect and dignity that he treated all those he considered friends. Ragnok had never been on a first name basis with any Wizard before Harry. But this boy – no this young man in front had not been a boy for a long time if at all – was so genuine and friendly that Ragnok was honoured to be considered a friend.

He broke out of his reverie and looked at the couple in front of him. All through the evening they hardly left each other's side. In fact Ragnok felt as though he had gone to a dinner hosted by Lord and Lady Potter since Hermione had assumed the hostess duties so naturally. Yes, looking at this couple he could sense something. Something he had not sensed in a very long time.

/Scene Break/

Albus Dumbledore was walking out of the Ministry of Magic with a self-satisfied smile and a twinkle in his eyes so brilliant that it made pictures from the Hubble Telescope look ordinary. The plans were in motion to get the boy back into his control.

He had just finished a private meeting with Minister Fudge and his plans for the captured Death Eaters were well on their way as well. Albus needed Lucius back with the Death Eaters quickly. Many of the senior members had been caught at the Ministry and that left Albus without a reliable contact to control their actions. As far as he knew, Bellatrix was in charge and Merlin knows what that psycho could get into her head.

Fudge was all for letting Lucius and some of the other lieutenants go, but he needed something that could justify those actions. Albus suggested a letter to Lord Black outlining a “fine” which could be paid for the freedom of Lucius and five others. That way they would go free and a sizeable amount of the Black Family fortune would help fund a number of “Ministry Initiatives” including Fudge’s retirement fund and Albus’ new villa in Hawaii.

Albus still wondered about the Grangers. They had not yet turned up at their home and no one had seen Hermione in days. Chances were that the little mudblood wouldn’t even show up for the reading, however just to be sure he had posted Order guards at all entrances to the Alley and had the outside entrance of Gringotts and the main public foyer under surveillance. All of them had portkeys ready to transport Hermione and anyone else who showed up with her to a secure location. If she showed up, they would ensure she did not make it to the reading.

“As for Harry, he won’t know what hit him,” he thought gleefully with the twinkle in his eye. Harry would not need to find out about the marriage contract until the day of the marriage. Arranged marriages between two families didn’t need a ceremony – just the signatures on the contract of those involved. He would just visit Harry on that day and have him sign some papers and then he would be married to Ginevra. Albus would tell the boy that the papers were meant to allow his emancipation and for him to receive his Potter inheritance. Technically marriage meant immediate emancipation that would allow Harry to claim the Potter inheritance. So, technically speaking he would not be lying to the boy – not that it really mattered anyway.

Albus made his way over to Gringotts in a very good mood. After today the boy would be under his control within a few months he may even have the misfortune of facing Voldemort again. Even with all his age and experience, Albus could not suppress a small fit of giggles as he strolled through Diagon Alley.

/Scene Break/

For almost two days Tom and Severus had been tending to the potion. Another few hours and it would be ready. Severus would make the trip to Geneva tomorrow to retrieve the “packages”. Tom thought to the week ahead and while it was absolutely necessary, it didn’t make it an easier to face. He had no idea how he might change as he made his way back to humanity – back to being mortal.

He thought of the Will reading today and decided to pay a visit to the compound tomorrow one last time before he underwent the ritual. He had a small smirk on his face as he thought, “I need to take Draco up on his promise of fealty and I wouldn’t be surprised if Bella has killed half the Death Eaters in frustration.”

/Scene Break/

Bellatrix Lestrange was busy finalizing the plans for the jailbreak. She was getting more and more desperate to have Lucius back before their Master returned. Everything was set. She would lead the Death Eaters into the Ministry tonight. The plan was simple (it had to be considering the source) – attack in force and power their way down to the holding cells. Once the prisoners were released, each Death Eater had a one-use portkey to bring them and an escapee back to the compound.

Bella shivered in anticipation – the Dark Lord was going to be so proud!

/Scene Break/

Draco looked at his reflection in the mirror. He was wearing deep purple dress robes, an acromantula silk cape and expensive dragonhide boots. He had insisted to his mother to purchase the outlandishly expensive and ostentatious outfit since he wanted to look the part of Lord Black when he received the ring. As he appraised himself in the mirror in a way that would have made his mother’s namesake proud, he mentally listed all the things that would change for him today.

I will be the emancipated head of an Ancient and Noble house.

I will actually be more powerful than Father since the House of Black is a more important pureblood house than the House of Malfoy.

I will pledge my loyalty and the fealty of the Black Family to the Dark Lord and he will give me my mark. Perhaps with my new importance I can get my assignment changed.

When I return to school, everyone will have to bow to me as the only student who was officially part of the Wizengamot and the Head of a house – even Potter. I will demand it.

Narcissa looked at her son and sighed. She wondered where she had gone wrong. The boy had his father's pride all right, and with the careful tutelage his father had provided it had expanded roughly ten times. She shook her head and was momentarily lost in her thoughts, "Look at him. He doesn't even know he's saying it out loud. To listen to him you would think it's his coronation. I mean he was insufferable when he made Prefect, but head of my family's house? And why does he still have this unhealthy obsession with Harry Potter?"

This was not the first time in her life where she wondered if Sirius and Andromeda had the right idea all those years ago. It was a pity she didn't have a chance to talk to Sirius before he died.

/Scene Break/

Lucius Malfoy was sitting in his cell at the Ministry of Magic. He was reading over the note that had just come from none other than Albus through a number of messengers.

"So, my son will be the new head of the House of Black. This is will allow us to consolidate our power base as long a Draco doesn't do anything stupid before I get a chance to speak with him," he pondered to himself looking out the window (the cell was actually many floors beneath the ground, but cells for Lords like Lucius had a wall which was charmed to look like a window – no bars were needed of course). "It looks like I will be out of here as soon as Draco receives the Black fortune and pays my fines."

He sat back and looked at the virtual scene outside. Everything would be back to normal once he was released. He could get back to maneuvering the Dark Lord into a confrontation with Potter and bring their plans to fruition after all these many generations. He allowed himself a smile – Albus may go down in history as the mastermind and the saviour of the Wizarding world, but Lucius Malfoy would be right there as well as the one who infiltrated the Dark Lord's organization and caused his downfall.

/Scene Break/

Back at Potter Manor, Neville Longbottom felt like he was in Heaven. He was taking a stroll through the grounds of the Manor with his new girlfriend Luna. His brain was trying to scream out to the world, "Yeah, that's right! I, Neville Longbottom, have a beautiful intelligent girlfriend who really likes me!"

The object of his affection whose hand was grasping his and whose lips were sharing kisses with his every few minutes had a knowing smile on her face as well. As Luna thought of the events of the past 24 hours she knew that it could not have gone any better.

/Flashback/

Luna and her father appeared in the entrance hall at Potter Manor at 11 am. Xenophilius greeted Harry warmly and they went in to talk with the Grangers.

Ten minutes later Neville and Augusta appeared. When they came in, Augusta pulled Harry aside and asked if they could speak in private for a while.

Meanwhile Luna had run to Neville and enveloped him in a big hug. Neville had returned the hug enthusiastically until he looked over her shoulder to see a bearded wizard in strange robes staring at him – not them just him.

Luna felt Neville stiffen and the intensity of the hug lessened. She immediately knew why and wondered just how much fun her father was intending to have.

They separated and Luna grasped Neville's left hand and led him over to her father introducing them, "Daddy, this is my boyfriend Neville Longbottom. Neville this is my father Xenophilius Lovegood."

Neville tentatively extended his right hand, "P-P-Pleased to m-m-m-meet you sir."

Xeno looked at the hand as if in judgment and then grasped it firmly and glared directly into Neville's eyes, "I have hear a lot about you from my daughter young man. Please tell me what exactly are your intentions toward my daughter?"

Neville had to think of an answer quickly. He could not risk breaking the man's gaze and for some reason Luna's father was not letting go of his hand. He felt a panic attack starting up inside of him when he felt the fingers of the hand holding his left hand start to caress his lovingly. The feeling of warmth and caring that brought on allowed Neville to find his voice and his courage.

"Sir, I like Luna very much. I don't know her as well as I want to but I feel something powerful between us. Your daughter is very important to me and is a very special person. For the past few days I wake up every morning feeling like the luckiest wizard in the world that your daughter wants to be my girlfriend." Neville managed to get this out without stuttering as the man had still not released his gaze or his hand. Beads of sweat were starting to form under his collar as he wondered whether his new will would be needed so soon.

"And if my daughter wants to go on a trip for find Crumple-horned Snorlacks?"

"I'll be taking pictures and notes for her."

Xeno finally smiled and let go of Neville's hand. He almost laughed out loud as he saw the boy relax, "Neville, I know of your family and it's history but that isn't as important as the actual person whom my daughter chooses to spend her time with. Luna has told me all about you and especially your last school year where you were training with Harry and the altercation you and your friends had at the Ministry. My

daughter is very perceptive and has a unique ability to read people and their intentions. If she has chosen you and feels as strongly as she does, then you are yourself a very special person. Please call me Xeno.”

/End Flashback/

Smiling at the memory, Luna turned and kissed her boyfriend again.

Both the Lovegoods and the Longbottoms had stayed at the Manor overnight. Harry had offered them each a guesthouse but Augusta and Xeno had instead opted to share one while Luna slept in the Manor.

Augusta and Xeno had returned to their respective homes that morning (with their new portkeys of course) and Neville and Luna decided to spend a quiet day with each other with Harry and Hermione were off at Gringotts.

/Scene Break/

Jane and Dan Granger had spent an entirely enjoyable day exploring the many paths and walkways around Potter Manor. They had asked the elves for a picnic basket and had eaten lunch in a secluded clearing that Jeeves had mentioned was a favourite spot for previous guests and residents alike. Both of them loved the guesthouse by the pond and they had wistfully thought that this would be the perfect place to retire to – not that they would ever think of imposing themselves on Harry like that.

By early afternoon they were walking hand-in-hand back to the guesthouse after spending several hours in the sunshine and fresh air. They stopped and kissed before holding hands again. As they got to the guesthouse Dan swept Jane off her feet and carried her inside. They both had the same thought – with any luck, Hermione wouldn't be back for a few more hours.

/Scene Break/

At Harry's request, the Goblins had reserved one of the larger boardrooms at Gringotts for the Will reading. There was a small room off to the side where Harry and Hermione would be able to watch the proceedings undetected until it was time to make their presence known.

At 2:30 most of the beneficiaries invited for the reading had arrived and were waiting in the main lobby of the bank. Albus had tried to move on ahead to the boardroom but he was told in no uncertain terms that the instructions from Lord Black were very specific and that no one would be allowed into the boardroom until everyone had arrived. Dumbledore had never suspected that Sirius would have made such strict stipulations and when he tried to argue this with Griphook, the goblin just reiterated that Ragnok had instructions from Lord Black and he was following them to the letter.

"It just isn't instructions from the same 'Lord Black' you think it is," thought Griphook as he was in an uncomfortable position for a Goblin – he actually felt like giggling.

Griphook looked at the assembled crowd and saw that everyone was there – minus Harry and Hermione of course. He got everyone's attention – 30 goblin warriors drawing their weapons had a way of doing that – and announced instructions to the assembled group.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, the Will reading for Lord Sirius Black will commence shortly. Before I lead you into the boardroom, I must announce the following stipulations requested by Lord Black for these proceedings. Once you are in the boardroom you may be seated. As soon as everyone is in the doors will be sealed and no one will be allowed into or out of the room until the end of the Will reading. There is to be no violence or spell casting. Anyone violating that will be escorted away by Goblin warriors. Director Ragnok will be handling the proceedings personally. If you must address him, you will use his title. You must all agree to these conditions or you will be asked to leave and forfeit your inheritance."

"Now I will lead you to the boardroom. As each of you approach the doorway I will ask for your oath to abide by Lord Black's requests. If you choose not to give the oath you will be escorted out of the Bank."

Griphook led the group past the warriors and down the corridor to the boardroom. Remus who was in the back of the group with Tonks and her parents noticed that the warriors formed up behind them and followed them down the hall. At the entrance, the group gave their oaths one by one and entered the room. Once Remus was inside, the warriors entered the room and took up positions around the perimeter. Griphook came through the door and sealed it behind him.

It was now 2:45. He signaled Ragnok that the first part was complete.

Ragnok left his office to head down to the boardroom. He had waited for Griphook's signal to send Harry's paperwork over to the Ministry. Ragnok suppressed a grin. After all this was a will reading. He shook his head and allowed his face to go back to its normal slightly condescending demeanour – but this was going to be so much fun!

/Scene Break/

A weekend clerk in the Department of Records summoned Percy Weasley from his office. He normally did not work on a Sunday but Audrey had a few things she wanted to take care of so Percy accompanied her and was just preparing his work for the week when the memo stamped "URGENT" landed on his desk.

He headed down to the Records department and the nervous clerk handed him copies of the documents that had just been sent over from Gringotts. Percy glanced over them and allowed himself to smile inwardly while still maintaining his normal stoic appearance.

He looked up at the clerk, "I need to get this information to the Minister right away." There had been a trace on any documents relating to Harry Potter for the past year and this was the first time it had been used. As he got into the elevator Percy thought, "Fudge is really going to be pissed."

/Scene Break/

Ragnok entered the boardroom with a large stack of papers and sat down at the head of the table. He looked at the assembled group.

Around the table sat Narcissa and Draco Malfoy, Ted, Andromeda and Nymphadora Tonks, Remus Lupin, Arthur, Molly, Ginevra, Ronald, Fred and George Weasley, To his immediate left sat Albus Dumbledore and the two seats to his right were unoccupied. Mind you since they were spelled to only admit the two people currently watching from the side room he wasn't too surprised they were empty.

"Ah well," he thought mischievously, "on with the show."

/Scene Break/

Percy exited the elevators but it was not on the Minister's floor. He was in the International Wizarding Federation floor currently headed for the Canadian consular offices.

Inside he found Audrey sitting at her desk. She looked up and got a smile the genuinely warm and caring smile she had whenever she saw Percy.

"You're still a bit early. I'm not finished yet."

He bent down and kissed her before saying, "I have to go see the Minister, but I thought you might like to see these before I go up."

He handed her the paperwork and as she was reading her mouth formed a perfect 'O' shape. She looked up, "He's going to be so pissed."

"I know. I think we should try to find the twins later. I'd really like to talk to Harry about what's going on."

"Agreed. But you better get up there before Fudge can accuse you of delaying this."

"I'm on my way," he paused at the door and went back to kiss her again, "I'll see you at 4:30."

/Scene Break/

Ragnok looked around the table again. He cleared his throat and started, "I..." he stopped. "Where are Hermione Granger and Harry Potter? Griphook!"

Griphook came running over to Ragnok, "Yes Director?"

"Where are Hermione Granger and Harry Potter? Not all of the beneficiaries are here. I thought you said all the notices had been sent out!" Ragnok was visibly upset.

Griphook was shaking. Even though he knew his Boss was acting, it was very convincing, "They were director. I don't know why Mr. Potter and Miss Granger are not here."

Ragnok was about to continue when Albus spoke up, "Pardon me Director ..."

Ragnok rounded on Dumbledore, "Is there a reason you feel the need to interrupt me Lord Dumbledore?"

Dumbledore looked like he had been slapped, "My apologies Director. However, I believe I can shed some light on those missing from these proceedings. Mr. Potter will not be here today he has authorized me to act on his behalf." He passed the note Harry wrote for him to Ragnok.

Ragnok looked it over noticing it said exactly what Harry said it would. Convinced that Albus had not really read it properly he reflected to himself of the arrogance of many of the pureblood wizards.

"Yes, this seems to be in order."

Dumbledore continued, "As for Miss Granger, I have been looking for her to discuss this reading since the notices were sent. Neither her nor her parents have been at home. I suspect that they are out of the country on vacation." Albus had breathed a sigh of relief when Hermione had not shown up for the reading. She had the potential to cause a lot of trouble and her absence would make this meeting progress a lot smoother.

Ragnok nodded. "Very well then. Shall we continue?"

"I..."

He was interrupted by the sounds of a commotion from the hallway.

/Scene Break/

Harry and Hermione were nearly oblivious to the start of the proceedings. It would still take some time for it to get interesting. This was Ragnok's part and he was playing the situation perfectly.

Besides, the sofa the goblins had provided them was perfect for two teenagers. Harry was currently reflecting on the wonderful taste of Hermione's new toothpaste.

/Scene Break/

Percy came running into Fudge's office. Not many people knew that Fudge always worked Sunday afternoons. His mother-in-law came over every Sunday afternoon and stayed for Dinner and while he couldn't get out of Dinner, the needs of the Ministry were always greater than entertaining his relatives.

He looked up annoyed at Percy, "Weatherby, why are you barging in here?"

Percy hid his annoyance, "I mean really, how hard is it to remember my name," he thought but he had to play his part, "Sir, these were just filed by the Goblins with the Ministry. I know your interest in the boy I retrieved these as soon as they were brought to my attention." He handed Cornelius the four pages.

Fudge started to read them, "Adopted? Lord Black? Emancipated? LORD BLOODY POTTER?" His stomach sank. He looked up at Percy, "Thank you Warwick. That will be all."

Percy turned and left the room smirking.

Fudge was trying to do something he usually failed at miserably – he was trying to think during a crisis. “I need to contact Albus. He’ll know what to do.” Then it hit him, “Oh SHIT! The will reading. I’ve got to warn him.”

He grabbed his bowler hat and apparated to the lobby of Gringotts.

/Scene Break/

Bellatrix had assembled her assault team of Death Eaters and was going over the final preparations. They would arrive at the Ministry at 5pm and attack with force. All of them had their masks, black cloaks and their portkeys to escape.

Bellatrix never reflected on the fact that a Death Eater portkey even worked at the Ministry where portkeys and apparitions only worked from the entrance hall unless you were specifically keyed into the wards. Other Death Eaters did, but no one would ever be stupid enough to ask the Dark Lord or any of his inner circle why.

They finished their preparations and some had a light meal in anticipation of the mission to come.

/Scene Break/

Amelia Bones usually worked Sundays well into the evening. That was part of the curse of working as the head of the DMLE. She had been extra frustrated over the past few weeks since Fudge seemed to be throwing up roadblock after roadblock of procedural delay in her prosecution of the Death Eaters captured a few weeks ago. Her niece Susan had convinced her to finish up today at three. Susan met her at her office and the two of them left the Ministry and went into muggle London to get an early dinner and go to a movie. It was one Amelia had been looking forward to – she always had a fascination with 007 and – if she would admit it to herself – a crush as well.

/Scene Break/

Jeeves had just finished overseeing the packing and transportation of the remainder of his Master’s belongings from Privet Drive to the

Manor. That morning a team of elves had cleaned the house and Jeeves had left the note his Master had written on the table in the front hall as he had been instructed. As he inspected the house one final time he could not help but smile at the homecoming his Master's family would receive. Especially since those two nice Weasley twins had been there most of the morning.

He left Privet drive heading for 12 Grimmauld Place in London to see if Kreacher needed any help finishing up there. They needed to be finished and out by the time the will reading was complete.

/Scene Break/

Cornelius arrived at Gringotts and walked briskly (the Minister of Magic could not be seen running) to the Head Teller.

The teller ignored Fudge for about a minute. He was busy stamping important deposit slips and no Wizard was going to interrupt that. After he finished he looked up at the blustering Fudge.

"What is your business with Gringotts today?"

"I need to know where the Will of Sirius Black is being read."

"It is being held in Boardroom B as we speak. However ..." the Head Teller never got to finish as Fudge took off down the hall. He immediately alerted the guards who quickly followed the Minister.

Fudge stopped short of the boardroom as he realized he was facing a squad of heavily armed goblins. He heard footsteps behind him and realized he now had another squad of heavily armed, pissed goblins behind him. They stood there at an impasse until the Head Teller was able to make his way down the hall.

"As I was about to say as you ran off, no one but beneficiaries were allowed into the room and as the Reading has now started the room is sealed in accordance with Lord Black's wishes."

Fudge tried to collect himself and stood up straight and tall, "I AM THE MINISTER OF MAGIC AND YOU WILL LET ME IN!"

The Head Teller looked at him, "Look sir, it doesn't matter if you are Merlin himself. No one is allowed into the room."

"LET ME IN. I AM THE MINISTER OF MAGIC. BY THE AUTHORITY OF THE MINISTRY I ORDER YOU TO LET ME PASS."

"Minister. You of all people should know that the Ministry has no control over how Gringotts conducts business as long as it is above board and according to the law. You have no Authority here to enter that room."

At that moment Griphook appeared in the hall. He looked at the Head Teller and pointedly ignored Fudge. "Fangtooth, what is the meaning of this disturbance? Ragnok's instructions must be followed."

"Mr. Griphook. The Minister here is not listening to my instructions."

"Well tell the Minister to either leave quietly on his own, or allow the guards to practice their eviction drills using him." With that Griphook disappeared.

Fudge looked around. While he was angered that this Mr. Griphook did not even acknowledge him or address him directly he was sobered by the suspicion that the "eviction drills" would not be pleasant. This thought was reinforced by the predatory looks on the faces of the goblin squads surrounding him. He lowered his head in defeat and left without saying another word.

/Scene Break/

When Griphook returned he nodded to Ragnok. "I'm sorry Director. The reason for the commotion outside has been taken care of. I have the assurances of the Head Teller it will not happen again.

Everyone in the room turned to face Ragnok again. He picked up the will and started reading again.

"I, Sirius Black..."

A/N – Well, here we are at the will reading. As usual I appreciate all the reviews and your suggestions are helping me craft this story and I think incorporating some of your ideas make it better – I hope you think so too.

Chapter 17 – Will We Make it Through the Will This Time?

“I Sirius Black being of questionably sound mind and godlike body do hereby declare this my last will and testament. All previous wills are declared null and void. This will has been witnessed and certified by Director Ragnok of Gringotts.”

Ragnok flipped two pages at the same time – the second page having been read earlier in the week. He cleared his throat and continued.

“Well, now. If I’m right, we have a few true friends around the table and then some relatives – here out of either love or greed – and finally the rest who don’t fit into either category.”

That sparked a few puzzled looks around the table. Everyone was looking at each other trying to figure out who was in the last group.

Ragnok cleared his throat again. He looked at Albus. “Now Lord Dumbledore, you have asked for an item to be presented at this reading and have obtained the authorization from the Ministry to include it in the will posthumously. As the order from the Minister and decreed, we will present it before we continue.”

“I Sirius Black do hereby propose a marriage arrangement between the Black and Weasley family namely, my ward and Godson Harry James Potter and Ginevra Molly Weasley. The wedding shall take place no more than one week following Ginevra’s fifteenth birthday.” Ragnok looked up and addressed the room.

“Lord Dumbledore has informed us that Lord Black signed this document shortly before his death. Following his Death Lord Dumbledore found the contract and presented it to the Arthur Weasley who signed the document binding the contract. However, since Lord Black was deceased when the contract was completed, it may still be cancelled by the new Lord Black.”

A big smile broke out on Draco’s face as his mind started racing, “Potter marrying the little Weasley? Ha fat chance I’ll turn that one down. She doesn’t have a cent to her name and he’s got a death

sentence from the Dark Lord on his head. He might as well be even more miserable before he goes.” He looked at Ragnok trying to get his attention.

Ragnok didn’t look at him.

He tried clearing his throat.

Ragnok must not have heard him.

A little bit louder.

Still nothing.

Clearing the throat and waving.

Still nothing.

The damn goblin was ignoring him! Draco was getting very angry. He was waving frantically now. What he couldn’t see were Remus, Tonks, and the Twins trying to keep the laughter in. Even Andromeda and Ted were smiling. Harry and Hermione were watching just to see how far Ragnok could take this.

Draco managed finally to knock a glass of water over and it spilled all over the table. Griphook acted quickly and dried up the water with a wave of his arm before it got to the will.

Ragnok turned his attention to the now red-faced Draco. Whether it was anger or embarrassment that was colouring his face was unknown. Ragnok seemed quite annoyed.

“Yes Mr. Malfoy?”

“Uh, um yes. I just wanted to say that I agree to the marriage contract.”

Ragnok stared at Draco for several seconds and then said in a very condescending tone “I see, Mr. Malfoy. I’m not quite sure yet what

bearing that statement has on these proceedings at this time, but thank you for sharing your approval.”

This time a bit of laughter actually broke out on the other side of the table but was quickly stifled again before Ragnok’s gaze made it over there.

Draco was pissed. His was screaming in his mind, “How dare he. HOW DARE HE! When I’ve finally got my ring, I will show the Goblins not to mess with Lord Black. And that goes for those people laughing as well.” He was about to say something when he saw the look from his mother. Lord Black or not, that look was deadly so he wisely kept his mouth shut.

Ragnok for his part desperately needed to call a recess but knew he could not. He set himself back to glaring at the young Malfoy until the urge to laugh had calmed down. He was really going to have to thank Harry for allowing him this opportunity again.

Dumbledore for his part merely felt a headache coming on. He was massaging his temples thinking, “Why did Draco have to be Lord Black? His intelligence is not too bad considering, but he has no restraint and an ego that just seems to get bigger every year. The last Lord Black was pretty easy to control once he got to Azkaban. I fear the new Lord Black will be much harder to control.”

He had no idea how true his thoughts were.

Ragnok finally calmed himself down enough to continue.

“To Andromeda, Ted and Nymphadora – na-na can’t hit me I’m dead – Tonks, I hereby reinstate you to the Ancient House of Black. Welcome back, my dear cousin. I wish I could have done this sooner. In addition, Andromeda and Ted Tonks will receive a sum of two million galleons and their daughter Nymphadora a sum of one million galleons.”

The Tonks’ were ecstatic. Andromeda had wondered why Sirius asked for them to be at the will reading. This was much more than she had hoped for.

Nymphadora was stunned. She was rich. This was way more than she would ever make as an Auror. Now she was rich and had a boyfriend.

“To Fred and George Weasley. You are always friendly and supportive of Harry and true to anyone who you consider a friend. To you I leave one hundred thousand Galleons to continue your quest for global prank domination.”

The twins gave each other a high five and proceeded to do their Happy Dance around the table. Now they knew they were both thinking the same thing – they needed that meeting with Griphook more than ever.

“To Ronald Weasley,” Ron perked up at the sound of his name and the twins had just got a load of money, “Ron, when I first met you I was taken by your loyalty as Harry’s friend. As I got to know of you over that summer from I thought you needed something special. So, I purchased a forty percent stake in the Chudleigh Cannons which I was going to give you as a graduation present.”

Ron was over the moon. He was going to be an owner of the Cannons! Now he could exert his influence and turn them into the league champions! Wow! He never knew Sirius was that loaded.

Ragnok saw the joy come across Ron’s face. It was followed by the inevitable look of concentration as he started thinking of plans for reshaping the team.

Ragnok was a master of timing. He paused and continued to watch the Weasley boy. In the side room, Harry and Hermione were watching their former friend. Harry glanced at Ragnok and then muttered, “Wait for it.”

Ragnok looked at the parchment and continued, “But then as time went on I began to see your true colours. I saw how you turned your back on your friends at the start of the Triwizard Tournament. You couldn’t see past your own jealousy and it took Dumbledore’s influence to get you to shut your mouth and get yourself in his good

books. Really Albus, after what he had done to Harry, who really believed Ron would be the 'one he would miss the most'?"

Dumbledore looked shocked.

"And don't look so shocked Albus. Remember when I crashed your little party in the Kitchen at Grimmauld completely drunk and I passed out in the corner. Well, now that I'm dead I'll let you in on a little secret – I was neither unconscious nor inebriated. Ah, but I digress. Ron, you showed just the man you really are. So say goodbye to the Chudleigh Cannons. I will leave it to the new Lord Black to figure out what to do."

Ron was stunned. His brain was still figuring out how to rewrite the playbook when the Director started speaking again. It finally registered in his brain. "Bloody Hell!" he screamed. His whole body sunk. He had just lost the Cannons and now they went to Malfoy? What could be worse than that? He looked over at Malfoy and saw the ferret laughing at him! He sunk down into his chair – things couldn't get any worse.

Albus was unsure where this was going. He wasn't sure what he had expected from Sirius, but this reading was quickly going downhill. He hastily tried to think back to the meeting Sirius was talking about. How much more had he heard? He was drunk a number of times it could have been any one of a dozen meetings. He also needed to get Lucius out and have him rein in his spawn. He could still keep the Black family under his control and if Sirius kept leaving things for Lord Black there would be more to work with than he thought there would be.

Harry and Hermione watched the tearing down of Ronald Weasley with a dual sense of joy and sadness. On one hand he used to be their friend, but on the other hand, he had never truly been their friend and revenge was bittersweet.

Now Draco's gloating on the other hand led them to anticipate the upcoming main event.

As soon as Ron had settled down with his forehead on the table, Ragnok started to read again.

“To Bellatrix Lestrange who probably isn’t here for Death Eater reasons. I Lord Sirius Black hereby disown you from the Ancient House of Black and declare your name stricken from the family tapestry.”

Ginny was watching the proceedings with a passing interest. Her part in this was almost over. Draco had already agreed to the marriage contract. She smirked and thought, “the Ferret probably doesn’t know Harry’s loaded. Well, Ron may have been screwed out of and inheritance, but I’m going to get mine as Harry’s widow. If Ron’s good to me I may give him a cut.”

“To Hermione Jean Granger,” (Ragnok and Harry had agreed that Hermione’s and Remus’ inheritances – at least the monetary parts – should be read out with all the others), “who has been my Godson Harry’s best friend I leave the sum of two million galleons. Hermione you are a fine young woman and I the time I spent getting to know you made me realize how lucky Harry is to have you as a friend and how lucky I was to make you acquaintance. You are going to be a force to reckon with for years to come.”

Ron looked up the gears once again trying to engage in his head, “Of course! Hermione! Once I’m her boyfriend I’ll make her so dependent on my attention since Harry will be with Ginny, that she’ll agree to marry me. Then her money will become mine.” His smile returned in all its glory.

The object of his delusions was at that moment wiping away silent tears from her eyes at Sirius’ words. There was also a strong sense of determination and she muttered to Harry, “Damn right I’ll be a force. Purebloods won’t know what hit them.”

Albus was thinking of those words as well. Once the Grangers reappeared, he would have to keep Hermione and Harry apart. She would have to be paired with Ronald as soon as possible. He would ask Severus to brew the appropriate potions when he returned.

“To my dear cousin Narcissa. Cissy, we haven't talked in a long time and I miss those days where we would do nothing but talk about anything and everything. I missed you. To be honest, there was only one thing I could think of giving you and I wasn't sure if you wanted it. So, in the end, I leave you some advice – If you want anything, please take the time to talk to the new Lord Black. He has a number of things he could give you and all you have to do is ask.”

Narcissa wiped away a tear. She missed Sirius deeply and even more so since he had dredged up the memories for her youth. She hadn't realized in a very long time how important those days were to her. She knew what she wanted. But there was no way she could get it from Lord Black.

Draco was scheming, “Hmm, if Mother wants anything from the Black Vaults she has to ask me. Well, she'll have to prove how much she wants it.”

“To my dear friend and brother Remus Lupin I leave the sum of two million Galleons and my entire wardrobe. Moony, you have to accept it this time. I can't take it back and I don't need it anymore.”

Remus felt Tonks' hand grab his under the table. It was still hard for him to believe he was gone.

“To Albus Percival Wulfric Brian Dumbledore, I originally wanted to leave you one of my names or titles but when I checked you already had too many.”

There were lots of chuckles around the table including from Dumbledore himself.

“But I digress again. Albus, pending Lord Black's approval, I offer the continued use of 12 Grimmauld place for your personal use.”

This bothered Albus. Why would Sirius risk exposing the Order of the Phoenix to Draco? No, there was something not right about this.

“Well, that just about wraps it up.”

Everyone looked around in shock.

Ragnok continued, "Just kidding. Where was I? Oh yeah. Draco Malfoy the Heir apparent to the House of Black. Draco, before I make your inheritance official I have a few things to get off my chest."

Draco who had sat forward at the sound of his name leaned back again with more than a hint of annoyance on his face.

"Draco if you want what is coming to you then you have to stay seated and keep your mouth shut. You know Draco, I don't like you. You are your father's son – a pompous, arrogant, asshole. I mean you are so full of yourself that you probably picked out the most expensive clothing you could find even if it doesn't go together. The idea of you as the head of the House of Black turns my stomach. I mean a head of a Noble and Ancient House should not be arriving at a battle of wits woefully unarmed. However, the succession bylaws of the House of Black are very strict. Ragnok will now give you your inheritance."

Ragnok produced a small but ornately carved box and passed it over the table to Draco.

Draco looked at the box hungrily. He unlatched it and opened the box – or at least he would have if it had opened. He grabbed the box in both hands and tried as hard as he could to pry it open. His inheritance was in there.

Fred and George could not help themselves; "Would you like some help with that Draco?" they said laughing. Draco glared at them and redoubled his efforts.

Harry and Hermione were now standing and holding hands. Harry looked at his girlfriend, "Are you ready?"

She nodded.

"It's almost time."

Draco finally dug his well-manicured nails into the seam and pressed. There was a hiss of air as the box popped open. Draco looked into it – it was empty. He looked up at Ragnok speechless.

Ragnok lifted the parchment again and started reading.

“Well Draco, how do you like your inheritance? You deserve all you got. In case you were wondering why the box was so hard to open, I had it sealed with a vacuum. You see I didn’t even want you to inherit air from me.”

Ragnok paused and looked up. Draco was seething, “I’m the next in line to the House of Black. He can’t keep it from me I demand my ring!”

Albus also surprised everyone by speaking up, “Yes Ragnok, Sirius has had his prank from the grave. Please can we get this over with and give Draco the ring?”

Ragnok did not answer directly. He just started reading again, “I bet you are all wondering right now if this is just some sort of prank. Well, I can assure you it is not – well I guess a ring box vacuum-sealed is a prank but you see Draco you are not the first in line for the Head of the House of Black. I can understand why you might think that, but the new Lord Black is none other than my son.”

With this revelation Ragnok paused as gasps were heard around the room. Draco set back in his chair deflated.

Fred and George broke into a new fit of giggles as they saw the look on Draco’s face. His skin was now so white even ghosts would have considerably healthier complexions. Even Ron joined into the mirth as he saw Draco strung along, built up and then destroyed. He didn’t even realize that is what happened to him moments before. The Ferret just got his ego handed back to him in a vacuum packed box. Just when he thought the day couldn’t get any worse, it just kept getting better. Besides, maybe he could make friends with Sirius’ son.

Albus was floored by this news. He was not aware of Sirius having a son. This was not good. He had no idea who the person was and it

would make it harder for him to control the situation. This could not get any worse. He had to know who it was, “Ragnok, who is Sirius’s son?”

Ragnok didn’t answer as a door behind him opened and a very familiar voice said, “I am.”

Everyone looked over to see Harry Potter and Hermione Granger emerge from a side room and walk over hand-in-hand to sit in the chairs to Ragnok’s right.

Albus looked over at Ragnok, “Director this is highly unusual. Harry is not Sirius Black’s son.”

Ragnok answered in a very direct manner, “I assure you Lord Dumbledore that Harry is Sirius’ son. I supervised the blood adoption ritual myself. His status was duly registered with the Ministry this afternoon just before the reading today.”

Albus sighed – things just got worse.

Ragnok continued, “In accordance with Lord Sirius Black’s instructions, once the adoption ritual was complete, the first part of the will was read to the new Lord Black. Harry was presented with the ring and was accepted. Also, as Head of the Ancient and Noble House of Black, Harry was also emancipated. These declarations were also filed at the Ministry at the same time.”

Albus was feeling sick, “I see, Harr...”

Ragnok interrupted him, “I’m sorry Lord Dumbledore but I was not yet finished. Since Harry was emancipated, I followed the instructions of his parents and executed the final instructions of the Potter will. Harry has also assumed his role as Lord Potter, Head of the Ancient and Noble house of Potter.”

Albus instantly felt his age – yes, definitely worse.

He tried to play another card, "Harry, you have no standing at these proceedings. You must have forgotten that you gave me the right to represent you. As such..."

"No, I didn't," interrupted Harry, "Ragnok, will you read the note aloud please? Just read the part about the will. The rest is between me and Lord Dumbledore."

"Certainly Harry."

Harry saw by the shocked looks of many around the table including the Headmaster that they noticed the level of familiarity between Ragnok and himself.

Ragnok began, "As for the will, please accept this note as my authorization to represent me at the July fourteenth will reading of Sirius Black and act in my interests for anything I may receive on that day."

Albus had a smug smile on his face.

Harry looked at Ragnok, "Can you please remind all of us what today's date is?"

"July the eighth."

"Thank you Ragnok. Now can you please tell Lord Dumbledore what that means?"

"This authorization note is only valid for a the will reading of Sirius Black on the fourteenth of July. It has no bearing on today's proceedings."

The smile left Dumbledore's face. His mind was actively trying to figure out how to get Harry back under his control.

Harry continued on, "Ragnok is there anything left to read from the will?"

“No, Harry, your inheritance was already covered in a separate meeting unless you want it read here as well.”

“No I think we can skip that part. I already know what I got and I would hazard a guess that everyone around the table has pretty much figured it out. I really just want to get these proceedings done.” He pulled out a piece of parchment and looked it over. “I just made some notes to make sure I didn’t forget anything.” He looked at the Tonks family.

“Andromeda, Ted, Nymphadora, I want to welcome you back to the Black Family. I will, of course, honour my new father’s wishes and uphold his reinstatement and your inheritance.”

Looking across the table he continued, “Cousin Narcissa, Sirius left me a private note outlining the inheritance he wanted to offer you. If you wish to discuss it at some point we can arrange a private meeting.”

“Headmaster, I also understand what Sirius offered to you. I think you would agree that this is not the venue to discuss it.”

“Draco, when I learned what Sirius had planned for you I could not remember hearing anything more appropriate. I’ve always thought you sucked.”

More snickers erupted from a certain part of the table.

“Ronald, my dear friend. We’ve experienced so much together through the years. It’s difficult to turn your back on such a friendship.”

Ron looked up at the sound of his name. Harry still wanted to be friends? Once again thoughts were flying through his head. “Wow he’s more dense than I thought. Maybe he’ll let me manage the Cannons!”

“However Ronald, I now know that we only had a one way friendship. You never considered me a friend – to use a muggle term, I was just a mark. In the end, there was not real friendship to turn my back on. Fred and George, would you like my stake in the Cannons?”

Fred and George looked at each other in glee.

“What do you think dear brother?”

“There’s certainly advertising possibilities.”

“Not to mention”

“The fact that”

“We’ll annoy our dear brother.”

“We’ll take it. Thanks Harry!” they finished in unison.

Harry looked at Arthur, Molly and Ginny. “Mr. and Mrs. Weasley, Ginny, the only reason you are at this reading at all is the marriage contract. Let me be totally serious here,” he paused smiling sadly at the old joke, “As both Lord Potter and Lord Black I hereby decline and dissolve the marriage contract between myself and Ginevra Molly Weasley. This contract was entered into without my knowledge and I’m sorry Ginny, but I just can’t see me spending the rest of my life with you. We don’t even know each other and besides, I’m in a relationship right now anyway.”

“HOW DARE YOU TALK TO MY DAUGHTER THAT WAY!” the entire room flinched as they got a full unadulterated dose of Molly. “THAT CONTRACT WAS SET UP FOR YOUR OWN GOOD! WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE YOU TO JUST CANCEL IT LIKE THAT?”

She paused as Harry glared right back at her. Forcing his anger down, he spoke to her with a tone of utter finality, “Mrs. Weasley, I am Harry James Potter-Black and these two rings,” he held up his hand willing both rings visible, “also mean I am Lord Potter and Lord Black. I have every right to cancel that contract, and I’m sorry but if you do not control your outbursts, I will ask the Goblins to remove you.”

Ron had finally had enough; he got up and ran over to Harry with the full intention of flattening him. He stopped just short as he noticed the goblin warriors with a look that – while Ron would never get the

reference – Harry recognized as a “Go ahead, make my day!” look. So Ron resorted to a verbal retort instead.

“How dare you talk to my mother like that. She took you in, fed you, and we treated you like family. And now this – you turn your back on us.”

Harry didn’t want this to happen, not here, not now, not yet.

He spoke to Ron quietly, “Ron, we all need to calm down and think things through. I think you should leave with your parents now.”

“Fine, come on Hermione, we know when we are not wanted.” He held out his hand to her.

She looked at his hand but did not move.

“What’s wrong Hermione, come on we’re going back to the Burrow.”

Her gaze shifted from his hand to his eyes. She had a distinct look of disgust on her face.

“Hermione, what’s taking you?”

“Ronald,” she finally said quietly, “why would I be joining you?”

“Well, I finally decided I’d like you to be my girlfriend.”

“And why would I want to be your girlfriend?”

Ron chuckled, “Why indeed?” he thought while looking at her with a smirk on his face, “Let me see, I’m the only guy who wants you seeing as I’ve made it clear to everyone else I ever saw look at you to avoid you? Whom else would you go with unless you wanted to be alone?”

SMACK! Ron felt a stinging on his face as he was now looking at a very angry Hermione. He looked around the room and realized that he had actually said what he was thinking.

Hermione composed herself as best she could, "Ronald Weasley, if it was a choice between you or being alone for the rest of my life, I would choose alone. I pity any female who has the misfortune of ending up in a relationship with you. And, before you start thinking that I'll be alone, I will have you know that I am in a relationship with a wizard who is the exact opposite of you. He knows how to treat act in a relationship."

"You're bluffing. No one else would go out with you."

At that point Harry stepped up and wrapped his arm around her, he looked at his former friend, "Ron, I think you are thinking more about yourself than Hermione. Please leave now before you say another word and convince the goblins to escort you."

Ron, Ginny and Molly left quickly followed by a still ghostly pale Draco Malfoy. Harry was slightly surprised that Narcissa came up to him and spoke, "Lord Black, I was wondering if we could talk about my possible inheritance."

Harry looked around the room. It seemed like Arthur and Albus were also waiting to speak to him. He responded, "Mrs. Malfoy, I have some other business to take care of right now, but I sense an urgency in your words. It is," he glanced at his watch, "4pm right now. Can you meet me back here in 30 minutes?"

For the first time Harry saw Narcissa Malfoy smile. "Thank you Lord Potter-Black. I will return then."

Remus came over with the Tonks Family. They talked for a minute and Harry invited them all over for dinner at 7pm. He assured Ted and Andromeda they would know where to go before 7.

Albus came up to Harry next.

"Harry, I am very disappointed. You promised me not to leave Privet Drive."

"I beg your pardon Headmaster, I promised not to walk out the door. As your guards will tell you, I have done no such thing."

“Harry, I insist that you either return to Privet Drive or the Burrow. It’s for your own protection.”

“No. I am emancipated and the head of two Houses. I will live where I choose and not where someone chooses for me to live.”

“But how will you be protected from Voldemort?”

“Headmaster where I am staying I have no fear from Voldemort of any other dark wizards.”

“Harry I insist!”

“You have the right to. Just as I have the right to decline.”

“Very well, I must also ask you about number 12 Grimmauld and it being the headquarters of the Order.”

“I agree. We should discuss it. Shall I meet you there tomorrow at 10 am?”

Albus knew when he was being dismissed and needed time to regroup if he was going to get Harry under control again. “Yes, of course. I will meet you then.”

Albus said goodbye to the Director and headed out of the room.

Arthur Weasley walked up to Harry and he looked embarrassed. “Lord Potter-Black” he began.

Harry interrupted him, “Mr. Weasley, Arthur, please I’m still just Harry.”

“Harry, I just wanted to apologize. I would have never signed that contract if I’d known you were against it. I’m not sure what has gotten into Molly and Ron and Ginny, but I’m very embarrassed about how they have treated you as of late. Harry, I’ve grown to see you as another son and you Hermione as another daughter, but I’m afraid

you both won't want anything to do with us after everything that has gone on."

"Arthur, I'm not mad at your entire family," Harry began as Hermione went up to the man and gave him a hug, "I still see you as one of my family, and the twins as well. I'm just not sure about the others, I'm sorry about that too."

Arthur looked up at the young couple in front of him, "You two go very well together." A tear started to roll down his face. He wiped it away, "I'm sorry, the past few days have been tough. I should get going."

As he turned, Harry said, "Arthur, would you and the twins like to join us for dinner at 7? I can easily arrange another few places."

Arthur looked at his boys and they nodded. He turned back to Harry, "Thank you I would like that. I just have a few things to take care of at the office. Where are you staying now?"

"Don't worry. Trust me when I say you'll know soon enough."

A/N – There you have it. The will reading in its entirety with no scene breaks.

So now we've managed to get past the will reading, there are still a lot of plot bunnies hopping around in this story line. I'm still not sure about what I'm going to do with Arthur but I have some ideas. You'll just have to wait and see.

Thanks to CatWriter for the idea about Ron's inheritance

Chapter 18 – Oh Mother Where Art Thou?

Draco Malfoy stormed out of the boardroom and marched off down the hall towards the Gringotts lobby. Pushing his way through anyone unfortunate to get in his way he headed over to the floo and with a flash of green flame he was gone and stepping out at Malfoy Manor.

He looked around almost surprised that he was home. He had been so engrossed in his thoughts that he barely registered going through Gringotts and using the floo. All things considered, he was pretty fortunate he actually made it there safely.

His thoughts were understandably obsessed with the humiliation he was just put through at the Will reading. “Potter is Lord Black! It’s not fair – I’m supposed to be Lord Black! Just wait until Father hears about this! He will get the Ministry to reverse this so-called ‘Blood Adoption’. That Inheritance is MINE! A vacuum-filled box? My Ass! I looked in that box and there wasn’t even air in it.”

Being his father’s son, he needed something to curse. Perhaps a session in the practice room underneath the Manor. Using Crucios on some training dummies might help. A house elf would make a more fulfilling target, but his father had expressly forbidden torturing the house elves when he was not present to join in.

He never noticed until much later that his Mother had not accompanied him home.

/Scene Break/

Harry and Hermione watched Arthur and his twin sons leave together with a hint of sadness. They both knew that Arthur was first and foremost a family man and that things were probably going to get worse for him before they got better.

They turned back to Ragnok and Griphook. Harry and Hermione went up to shake the Goblins’ hands.

“Ragnok, Griphook, on behalf of the Black family and especially my late adopted father Sirius, thank you. I don’t think the Will reading

could have been handled any better than it was. The look on certain faces was priceless. In fact, I may go home tonight and watch the memory in a pensieve just to relive it all over again.”

Seeing that they were alone with Harry and Hermione, the two goblins finally were able to burst out laughing. Ragnok had to wipe tears from his eyes. Once he calmed down enough he looked at Harry and replied, “Oh my, I haven’t laughed that hard in years. It was so difficult keeping a straight face. Harry, you are very welcome however we have to thank you as well. A wizard Will reading is usually a very formal and stoic affair and Pureblood wills such as the Black family usually follows a very structured format. Sirius and you gave us the opportunity to participate in a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.” Ragnok’s face scrunched up again, “A vacuum-sealed box...”

The old goblin nearly fell over laughing – it was an infectious laugh that got the other three in the room laughing again.

/Scene Break/

Albus Dumbledore headed straight back to his office at Hogwarts. To say he was angry and confused was an understatement. That little shit Potter had managed to escape his plans for him. Now he was Lord Black and Lord Potter.

“I knew I should have sent Sirius back to Azkaban when I had the chance. He royally screwed things up. How am I going to get Potter under control now?”

Thinking back to the Will reading he knew that there were a few screw-ups along the way. The young Weasleys had tipped their hat too soon. They shouldn’t have turned their backs on him until after they had gotten him married off. And Granger? They should have been dosing her with Amorentia while she was in the infirmary recovering.

Dumbledore was not a stupid man. He noticed that Potter and Granger came out holding hands. He had suspected something was developing between them and even thought they got along a little too

well for just being friends. He thought that Harry stayed out of the way out of loyalty to Ronald and Ronald had effectively kept all other competition away from Hermione. Ronald was going to start giving her the potion at the Burrow later this month and would have had her abandon Harry altogether shortly after that.

No, Lord Potter-Black had not been in any of his plans. He would now have to propose an alliance with the new Lord. Perhaps get him to allow Albus to use his Wizengamot votes by proxy. He would have to be careful tomorrow when he met with Harry. Harry now had more freedoms being an emancipated head of two Ancient houses.

An ambush and capture would not work. Even Albus Dumbledore could not come up with a good public reason to do this. No, it had to be much more subtle. Perhaps offer him training to help him face Voldemort. "Or," he thought slyly, "maybe I should have him help me find and destroy those damn Horcruxes. I'll help find them and 'allow' Harry the honour of destroying them."

A big smile played on his face, "Yes. How does that old muggle saying go? Keep your friends close and your enemies closer."

/Scene Break/

It was getting close to 4:30. Bellatrix and her band of not-so-merry-and-quite-scared shitless-of-their-leader band gathered outside the compound. The portkeys to take them to the Ministry were ready and everyone was going through their final preparation.

Bellatrix was thrilled beyond belief. Everything was set. A shudder went through her entire body. This was better than sex.

/Scene Break/

At precisely 4:30 Percy met Audrey just as she was locking up the Canadian office. She greeted him with a big hug and kiss. As they were leaving the Ministry they ran into Arthur and told him they were on their way to see the twins.

“I’ll meet you there at,” Arthur glanced at his watch, “quarter past 5. I just have to pick up some things at my office.”

“We can wait for you or come with you, “ Percy said with Audrey nodding.

“No, I’ll be fine. You go ahead – Fred and George are waiting for you.”

Audrey and Percy left the Ministry at quarter to 5.

/Scene Break/

Harry was just finishing up with the Goblins when Narcissa Malfoy walked back into the Boardroom. Harry greeted her, “Mrs. Malfoy, I’m so happy to see you. Do you oppose to anyone of these others being here? They will understand if you do not.”

Narcissa looked to the two goblins and Hermione. If what Sirius wanted for he was what she thought, it would be prudent for the Goblins to remain here. As for the girl, Narcissa could read body language and signals very well. The girl and Lord Potter-Black were involved and Narcissa could feel that there was much more there than met the eye. There was a good chance that she was looking at the future Lady Potter-Black and Narcissa was not going to take a chance to piss her off. “No, Lord Potter-Black, I do not object to anyone here. And please, call me Narcissa.”

Harry smiled, “Thank you Narcissa. Please call me Harry. I don’t know if you have ever met, but this is Hermione Granger.”

The two women shook hands politely.

Harry began, “Narcissa. Sirius left me quite a note about you. He missed you deeply. He said that when you were growing up that the two of you with Andromeda used to spend a lot of time together and were the best of friends. When Andromeda and he were ostracized from the family, he felt as though he had lost you.”

“Harry, in some ways he had. I didn’t have the courage to go against my family wishes and I was promised to Lucius. When the two of them were kicked out of the family I lost a part of myself. Now that Sirius is dead I fear I will never get it back. I don’t even know if Andromeda would talk to me after all these years.”

“Narcissa,” Harry paused looking a little uncomfortable, “Sirius wanted me to ask you if you are truly happy with your marriage, your family, your life.” He saw Narcissa beginning to withdraw and added quickly, “Nothing you say here will ever leave this room.”

Narcissa had suspected where this was leading. She knew that the next few minutes would affect the rest of her life. She took a deep breath and closed her eyes. When she opened them she looked at Harry with an extremely serious look in her eyes, “Harry, it feels strange talking about this to you but I know that given different circumstances I would be talking to Sirius. I didn’t know it would be so hard to answer.”

Harry looked softly at her, “Narcissa, I completely understand wondering if you can trust me. I’m thinking the same thing but my love and respect for my adopted father is allowing me to have this conversation with you. This is what he wanted. Where this conversation goes from here depends on your answer.”

“Harry, I’m not sure how you can be so calm. Sirius’ wishes or not, why don’t you see me as the enemy?”

“Over the past few weeks my ideas of who is a friend and who is an enemy have turned upside down.” He saw Narcissa look puzzled, “It’s a long story. The key is here that I really don’t know who you are. Too many people in this world base their judgments on who others are before they really get to know them I know that I would not at this point trust your son or husband but I know better than trust by association. I do know that you have not taken the Dark Mark so you can’t be completely evil.” He said the last part with a smile.

Narcissa was stunned by the straightforward and mature answer she got from this young man. “So unlike Draco. He may be young, but he acts like a head of a house,” she thought to herself. Taking another

deep breath and closing her eyes she thought about the question on the table. Opening them she looked at Harry and said, "Happiness is not how I would describe my life, family and marriage but one is bound to one's duty."

"And if this 'duty' could be lifted from you? How would you react?"

"I'm not sure. I would pursue the opportunity if it arose as long as it had the promise of improving my life."

"And you husband and son?"

"I never loved Lucius. I had even thought that being a mother would compensate, but once we had an heir, Lucius was more interested in the Dark Lord than making more children. As for Draco, he has become everything I hate in his father multiplied by five. He treats me worse than Lucius does."

"Narcissa, as your Lord Black and head of house I am offering the following if you so choose. I will declare your marriage to Lucius Malfoy forfeit. He will retain full custody of Draco until Draco is of age. The dowry of five hundred thousand galleons will be retrieved by the goblins and deposited in a vault under the name of Narcissa Black. There will be an additional one million five hundred thousand galleons added to the vault as your inheritance. You will receive the protection of the Black family and will be allowed to hide in a Black residence of your choosing until it is safe for you to rejoin society. Also, you must swear loyalty to the Black Family and it's head."

Narcissa was stunned. Before she could say anything Harry added, "There's just one catch – you have to answer before you leave this room."

Narcissa nodded, "Harry – Lord Potter-Black – I accept your gracious offer. When to we leave?"

Everyone around the table smiled. Harry and Narcissa signed the appropriate documents and Ragnok and Griphook prepared to file them the next morning. Harry disappeared for a moment and returned

with a strange book. As soon as he started writing in it, Narcissa knew of Potter Manor – and so did a few others.

Harry was holding Hermione's hand. He held his other out to Narcissa. "For now you can stay at my place it's quite secure and I fear for your safety if you go back to Malfoy Manor." Narcissa smiled and walked over and took his hand. They left an empty boardroom behind as they disappeared.

/Scene Break/

As soon as they left the boardroom, Tonks said goodbye to her parents and dragged Remus to the carts. She wanted to see her vault and the new galleons in it.

Remus chuckled and shook his head. They had already spent a lot of time in vaults recently.

/Flashback/

Remus and Tonks had spent most of Saturday in the vault with all of the Black Family artifacts. Tonks' Auror training came in handy detecting dark spells and curses and between the two of them they made it through all of the artifacts. They had taken a break at dinner and gone out to a local restaurant. They begged off Harry's party since they wanted to finish before the Will reading.

It was nearly midnight when they finished with all the artifacts. There weren't too many of them that needed discarding and the others that were spelled were easy to fix. The only one they didn't touch was a locket with an S on it. Harry had told them to leave it as-is. After the long day, Remus was ready to leave. Tonks however had other ideas. She had found a very nice four-poster canopied bed back with the furniture.

She looked at Remus and wiggled her eyebrows. "Ever done it in a vault?"

/End Flashback/

Remus could not help smiling at that. In the past few days the two of them had grown closer and her outgoing personality was helping Remus come out of his shell and show some of his former Marauder personality. He hadn't felt so alive in along time and he was glad he had let this young woman into his heart.

Tonks was growing closer to the man all the time. She had suspected that quiet, shy man was – pardon the pun – a wolf in sheep's clothing. She was ecstatic that he was ore than she had suspected. Remus was unlike any other man she had ever met. She was falling for him hard. He hadn't even asked her to change into any particular shape of form. He just accepted willingly any shape she felt like at the time. "Hmm," she thought, "I wonder if there's any way to make galleons comfortable."

He looked at her an immediately knew what was on her mind. He bent to her ear, "We have to take your parents to Harry's for dinner."

"Yeah, that gives us an hour though."

/Scene Break/

Molly, Ron and Ginny arrived through the floo into the kitchen at the Burrow.

Ginny looked at her mother, "Mum, what happened back there? I mean it's been planned out for years. I'm supposed to marry Harry. I'm supposed to be Lady Potter. I'm supposed to get his money when he dies."

Molly was still livid as she took in her daughter's questions. "I know Ginny dear. Albus was so insistent that he had this all planned out. We did everything we were supposed to. Don't worry dear, I'm sure Albus will fix it. He has to."

Ginny continued, "But Mum, did you see Harry and Hermione when they walked out? I'm sure Hermione's his girlfriend."

"Now dear don't go jumping to conclusions. You know they've always just been good friends. I'm sure..."

Ron's brain finally clicked in, "BLOODY HELL. She was holding hands with him wasn't she? AND he put his arm around her. That backstabbing son-of-a-bi..."

"RONALD! Watch your language!" Molly reprimanded her son. "Both of them mentioned being in a relationship. They may be together. However that can be solved with a little Amorentia."

Ginny smiled the smile she normally reserved for a person just about to get her infamous bat-bogey hex, "Do you think Dumbledore will get us some?"

Molly shook her head and stood up proudly, "No need, I'm pretty good a potions myself and Amorentia is one of my specialties. Who wants to help me brew?"

Ginny thought this was a great idea and started helping. Ron begged off – it was too much like homework and he had enough of that at school.

/Scene Break/

4:59pm

Bella signaled everyone into position. A minute later they were gone and reappeared the lobby of the Ministry. The ministry appeared deserted with the exception of the guard station. It was quickly destroyed but not before the guard activated the alarm.

"Oh shit!" Bellatrix thought. She yelled instructions to her team, "The off-duty Aurors will be here in ten minutes. Everyone to the elevators now!"

The three elevators were just enough to hold everyone as they descended to the prison level. The doors had opened once or twice on other floors. The volley of curses coming out of the doors as they opened ensured no one was able to get onto the already full elevators. They were going too slow – Bellatrix whined in frustration.

The rest of the Death Eaters in her elevator heard it and wondered not for the first time if they would make it out alive.

All through the Ministry around them Alarms were going off and the on-duty Aurors were trying to get an elevator going up to check on the guard station and why the guard was not answering. Finally one of them yelled, "They're after the prisoners and the Auror corps headed for the stairwell to take them two floors down to the holding cells.

/Scene Break/

Lucius heard the alarm claxon through the door. He shook his head – Bellatrix was on her way. Sighing, he picked himself up and straightened his robes the best he could. He had to take over as soon as that door opened or it would be hell for all of them.

/Scene Break/

Arthur had been thinking of the events of the past couple of days as he went to his office. He knew his marriage was most likely over. That realization came to him based on the conversation he had over the past few days.

/Flashback/

Arthur walked up to a small cottage. He had come here hoping for some shelter and a sympathetic ear to talk to. As he knocked on the door, he was questioned and after he answered a pair of decidedly female arms enveloped him in a hug. He returned the hug and went inside.

Fleur released him from the hug. "Oh Arthur, it ees so nice to see you. I am zo sorry for dee questions but Bill he vants me to be careful."

"I understand Fleur – you can never be too careful. You are looking as beautiful as always."

Fleur already found she cared for her future father in law. He was one of the kindest, gentlest men and yet was devoted to his family and

their protection. When she first met Bill's parents she realized the man she loved took after his father with very little of his mother. Fleur could not stand Molly and she was pretty sure the feeling was mutual, but she was instantly taken with Arthur.

Bill came into the room and looked at his father, "Dad, why are you here? I mean, we are always glad to have you, but you look like something is bothering you? Where's Mum?"

"Your mother is probably back at the Burrow. But yes, you are right. I am troubled and I was wondering if I could talk to both of you I just don't want to go back to the Burrow."

"Sure dad, come on in, we'll make some tea." Fleur nodded and went to the kitchen. Arthur hugged his son. They stood there for a while before Arthur took a step back. Fleur came back in with the tea.

Arthur began, "It's a long story." He proceeded to tell them more about the events at the Ministry than they had already heard and how Ron, Ginny and Molly had reacted to the other students – especially Harry. He told them about Percy and Audrey.

Bill smiled ear-to-ear with the news of Percy. Arthur told them a bit about Audrey and how perfect she was for him.

He then continued with their reactions Percy got from Molly and also her reaction to the Twins' visit. He also talked about the marriage contract between Harry and Ginny and how Molly and Albus were so insistent that he sign it and then he related how Percy had found out Albus strong-armed it into the will with the Minister's consent. Arthur finally ended with details about his evening and how he ended up on their doorstep.

Bill and Fleur's hearts went out to the man in front of them. Bill had never seen his father like this and Fleur was touched by the trust Arthur had for her and Bill to pour his heart out to them as he had. By the time Arthur had finished his story it was late and then could see he was exhausted. They offered Arthur their guest room for the night.

Saturday was spent talking more to Fleur and Bill trying to make sense of the whole situation. Bill initially tried to remain impartial but he quickly found that he was siding with the Twins and Percy.

They insisted that Arthur stay the night again and go to the will reading from there.

/Flashback/

"I need to get my oldest boys together. We need to talk about what we are going to do," Arthur thought. Suddenly another thought entered his head as he learned about Potter Manor. He smiled, "so that's what Harry meant."

He was jarred from his thoughts by the alarms going off through the Ministry. He immediately knew what was happening – Death Eaters were coming for the prisoners.

He drew his wand and headed for the stairs.

/Scene Break/

Albus was startled by a floo call from Fudge.

"Albus, the Ministry is under attack again."

"But that's impossible! None of the regular leaders are there and they wouldn't..." he trailed off.

Both Albus and Cornelius said in unison, "Bellatrix."

"Cornelius, if you can, order the Aurors not to engage or we'll have a blood bath on our hands. Hopefully as soon as they get to Lucius he'll be able to take control and get them out of there. We don't need another major Death Eater raid right now. The public hasn't swayed far enough back to neutral since the last attack."

Fudge nodded and disappeared again.

"Shit. Can this day was getting even worse?" Albus said to himself.

/Scene Break/

The elevator music was starting to get to Bellatrix. She had already killed the Death Eater beside her as he started humming the tune that pushed her over the edge.

Finally the doors opened on the holding cell level and a volley of stunners and binding spells met the Death Eaters. They responded with darker and darker curses as Bellatrix started destroying everything in her path. They made mincemeat of the Aurors (all half-blood and muggle-born since Purebloods did not work Sundays) and continued down the hall.

They found the holding cells and started releasing their inner circle. They had not encountered any other resistance, but Bellatrix was still destroying everything. It wasn't until the freed Malfoy that he was able to calm her down. He looked around at the destruction and shook his head.

"Bellatrix, we must leave now" She nodded. At once all the Death Eaters grabbed either a prisoner or one of their fallen comrades and activated their portkeys.

Suddenly Bellatrix, Rookwood and Lucius were alone on the level.

Or so they thought.

Arthur had crept up from the opposite end of the hallway. Now Arthur knew his limits and had no illusion that he could take on either Bellatrix or any of the other of the inner circle let alone all of the Death Eaters he saw. He was close enough, however to overhear the conversation.

"Bellatrix, what in Merlin's name are you doing?" Lucius demanded, "Did our Master authorize this?"

"But Lucy," Bellatrix always annoyed Lucius by calling him Lucy, "The Dark Lord ordered me to plan the take over of the Ministry and I couldn't do it without you. He didn't say I couldn't break you out."

“Oh, Bellatrix, you’ve messed up things you can’t begin to understand. Go back now. The Aurors will be here any minute and Rookwood and I need to leave a surprise.”

Bellatrix giggled and disappeared after giving Lucius a spare portkey.

Rookwood spoke up, “Merlin’s beard Lucius, that woman is a menace to all of us. She’s may have royally screwed up Dumbledore’s plans.”

“I know. Dumbledore and Fudge had arranged for Draco to pay a huge fine for us from the Black fortune he inherited today and we’d be free. I’m still considering staying and letting that play its course.”

“You know after this Dumbledore and Fudge will have to make an example out of some Death Eaters. Maybe it’s time to get rid of the half-blood Snape.”

“That’s an idea worth considering. I’ll pass it by Albus and if he agrees we’ll convince Tom that Severus betrayed us. You know, I’m glad this is winding down. As soon as we can get Potter and Voldemort to actually duel to the death, Albus can enact his endgame.”

“What do you think, should we stay or should we go?”

“If we go there will be trouble.”

“But if we stay it will be double.”

“Lucius just let me know, should we stay or should we go? Wait what’s that?”

They heard the elevators opening again and disappeared.

Arthur mulled over what he heard. “Inner Circle Death Eaters take orders from Dumbledore? Something’s not right here.” Maybe his boys could make something of it.

He crept back up the way he came and left the clean-up crew to their work. He looked at his watch. It was 5:15. He had to get to his boys before they started worrying.

/Scene Break/

A few hours later Lucius arrived at home after a quick stop in the Death Eater compound. He needed to talk to Draco and Narcissa. He found Draco in his room staring at the wall.

"Hello Draco."

Draco looked up and when he saw who had spoken his face lit up for the first time in several hours. "Father!" he shouted, "What are you doing here?"

Lucius looked kind of uncomfortable, "Well, your Aunt Bellatrix came and got me."

"You mean she broke you out."

"Yes. But don't worry; I have allies in high places. I just need to lie low for a while until I can get matters arranged. So, how does it feel to be Lord Black my son?"

Draco's face fell. He muttered something unintelligible to Lucius.

"Son, you know what happens when you keep information from me."

"I said, ask Potter."

"Why would I ask him?"

"Because he stole the Lord Black title from me."

Lucius was stunned. Much of the Black fortune was already spent. Fudge, Dumbledore and him had plans. "This turn of events is ... disappointing."

“DISAPPOINTING? Do you know how I feel? I was made a fool of in that room.”

“DRACO! I am still your father and you will address me with respect.”

Draco cowered appropriately. “Yes father. That was conduct unbecoming a Malfoy.”

“That’s better Draco. Now how did Potter usurp your claim to the Head of the Black family.”

“Well, apparently Sirius adopted him. Some sort of thing called a blood adoption. I was wondering if you could perhaps get it changed?”

“No, unfortunately a blood adoption is permanent. He now has Black blood in his system and a Heredity Test would show Potter, Evans and Black lineages. Sirius thought that one out very well. Draco, I would like you to tell me everything about the Will reading.”

Draco told him about the reading, about how he was set up and made to look like a fool, how Andromeda was brought back into the family, the dissolution of the marriage contract and how close Potter was to the Mudblood.

“And how did that old coot Dumbledore take all of this? He must have been happy his protégé came out on top.”

“Actually father, I’m not sure he was too happy. Potter did undo the marriage contract that the Headmaster seemed to favour. I also think that Dumbledore did not expect Harry or the Mudblood to be there. He seemed quite distressed about it.”

“So his plans were thrown in the crapper as well,” Lucius thought. Draco interrupted him from his musings, “Father there is something else. Now that you are home, I need your help.”

“With what Draco?”

“Well, earlier this week the Dark Lord himself gave me a task to prove our family’s worth.”

Lucius stared at his son for a moment. Thoughts ran through his head, “It can’t be that bad but, shit, I go away for a couple of weeks and things go to pieces. Whatever Tom had in store for Draco, I’m sure we can sort it out.”

“What did he command of you?”

“Well, I have to complete it before the end of the next school year.”

“I ask again, what is it?”

“I ... I have to kill Dumbledore.”

Lucius felt faint. This day just could not get any worse.

“Well, I’m sure I can convince him to let you have help.”

Draco looked at the floor, “There’s one other thing.”

Lucius felt the blood rush away from his head, “And that would be.”

“I also kind of promised him the loyalty of the Ancient House of Black as soon as I become Lord Black. I’m hoping...”

Lucius didn’t hear another word as the floor rushed up to greet him.

Draco revived his father with an Ennervate spell. “Father, are you alright?”

“Yes, please go get your mother. I need one of her pepper-up potions. This day has taken a lot out of me.”

“She’s not here.”

“Where is she?”

“I don’t know. I didn’t see her after the Will reading. I was so angry I stormed out of there and come to think of it I haven’t seen her since.”

“Why would she have stayed?”

“Hmm. Oh yeah, the will mentioned something about an inheritance only Lord Black could give if she wanted it. I’m not sure what thing she would be inheriting, but it must be pretty valuable.”

Lucius went through the words carefully. “Oh no. She didn’t, He didn’t.”

“Didn’t what father?”

Before Lucius could answer, they heard an owl tapping at the window. Draco opened the window and the owl flew in, dropped a letter in front of Lucius and flew out. Lucius picked up the letter – it had the Gringotts seal, in fact Ragnok’s personal seal. This wasn’t good. He opened the letter and read.

For the second time that night his brain could not cope with the information he was given and he fainted again.

A/N – I make no apologies for the not so subtle rip off of the clash. It was late when I was typing it in an airport waiting area and it came to me and the rest is history.

Chapter 19 – Sisters are Doing it for Themselves

Harry, Hermione and Narcissa appeared at Potter Manor. While Hermione showed Narcissa to one of the available guest rooms, Harry went down to see how Tom and Severus getting along.

He knocked on the cottage door and the door opened revealing a tired-looking Severus. Harry walked in and Severus led him to the sitting room where Tom was relaxing. Tom looked up and greeted Harry.

“Hello Harry. Severus and I were sitting here wondering how the Will reading went.”

Harry chuckled and proceeded to tell them about the reading. Once he was done, Tom and Severus were laughing loud. Once again the sight struck Harry as quite odd. He was sitting with two people who just weeks ago were considered his enemies. Now they were sharing a laugh over the misfortune of people whom they had considered allies before. He shook his head slowly; things had changed and were continuing to change at a fast pace.

“There’s one more thing. I, um, kind of broke up the Malfoy’s.”

Severus head snapped so quickly towards Potter that he almost got whiplash, “What do you mean?”

“Well, Sirius left instructions for me to speak to Narcissa privately. I asked her about her future and made her an offer. In short, she now has a vault with two million Galleons and is now once again Narcissa Black.”

Tom started laughing again but the real surprise was Severus. For some reason that Harry was not quite sure of, the Potions Master had the biggest grin on his face that Harry had ever seen.

“Where is Narcissa now? If Lucius finds out she may be in danger.”

“She’ll stay here at the Manor for a while until we can set her up at one of the Black family properties. I’ve invited a few people for dinner

tonight. Andromeda and her family are coming as well as Remus and a few of the Weasleys. Would you two care to join us?"

Severus nodded like a bobble-head doll in a car going over a rough gravel road. Tom hesitated, "Harry, I'm not so sure. People may not be as accepting of me as you think."

Harry reluctantly agreed and changed the subject, "How is the potion coming along?"

Severus spoke up, "Actually it is completed. We are ready to go through the ritual and reintegrate the soul fragments. "

Tom nodded with a serious face and spoke up, "We are not sure of the effects of the ritual and the reintegration of the soul pieces. I need to visit my headquarters tomorrow and talk to young Mr. Malfoy and see how Bella is getting along. After that, Severus and I will "disappear" for a few weeks. Hopefully by then, Voldemort will cease to be."

Just then, Jeeves appeared. "Harry, Fred and George Weasley are in the entrance hall. They are requesting to speak to you immediately."

Harry, looked up at the two men, "If you'll excuse me, Severus, dinner will be at seven," and with that he was gone.

Tom looked over at Severus, "You still care for her don't you?"

"How did you know?"

"Despite your Occlumency, your minor facial expressions and body language gave you away."

/Scene Break/

Arthur arrived at the flat above the WWW shop shortly after half past five. The conversation he had overheard between the escaped Death Eaters was still going through his mind.

His children could see he was agitated and looked very concerned. As he came in he looked at his boys, "Could one of you please floo-call Bill and Fleur? I need to talk to all of you."

Fred nodded and proceeded to call his eldest brother and future sister-in-law. A few minutes later Bill and Fleur stepped through the fireplace and brushed themselves off. Bill saw Percy and smiled broadly going over and hugging his brother. Percy introduced Bill and Fleur to Audrey.

Arthur motioned them to sit around the table. Once seated they all noticed the very serious look in Arthur's face.

He started, "There was a Death Eater raid on the Ministry this afternoon."

A barrage of questions interrupted him but he put his hands up to signal for quiet, "Please, let me tell you what I need to and then you can ask me questions."

Arthur relayed to the group how he visited his office and heard the alarm. Everyone listened intently as he explained how he snuck down to the holding-cell level and observed the breakout. When he got to the conversation he overheard, the twins did not look as surprised as the rest and shared a knowing glance.

As he finished up, Arthur said, "So, then I snuck back out and came here straight away. I needed to talk to you all about what happened."

Bill, Fleur, Percy and Audrey were speechless. Fred and George had funny looks on their faces. Arthur looked from one to the other and spoke again, "Why do I get the feeling you two aren't very surprised by this news?"

"Well," started Fred, "it's because we aren't."

George took in the new look of shock on everyone's faces. "Gred, I think we need to contact someone."

“I agree Forge,” he looked around at the five others who were staring at the twins with a look of apprehension, “Don’t worry – we just want to get someone who can explain.”

“Please everyone, trust us. We’ll be right back.”

The twins got up and disappeared.

Bill broke the silence, “Well what was that all about?”

/Scene Break/

Andromeda and Ted Tonks were waiting for their daughter and her new boyfriend. Andromeda had known Remus as one of Sirius’ school friends and had liked the shy young man. When Nymphadora introduced him to them as her boyfriend a couple of days ago Andromeda took one look at her daughter and had seen a look of happiness and contentment that she had never seen before. At that moment she realized that she would not stand in the way of any man who could make her daughter that happy.

It was just after 6 pm when a slightly disheveled Remus and Nymphadora appeared at the Tonks’ residence. Remus had received a Patronus message from Harry asking for them to arrive early. He relayed the message to Andromeda and Ted and they all agreed to leave as soon as they were ready.

/Scene Break/

Harry arrived back in the entry hall to find the twins. They both ran over to Harry and started speaking in twin-speak.

“Harry!”

“We need you,”

“To come with us,”

“Right away!”

Harry looked from one to another, "Whoa guys! Settle down. What's the problem?"

"Dad knows,"

"About the"

"Conspiracy."

Harry was shocked. "What do you mean he knows?"

"Come,"

"With us."

Harry grabbed hold of their shoulders and they disappeared from the Manor.

They reappeared in the Twins' loft. The other people were surprised to see that Fred and George had brought Harry along.

Harry looked around and was momentarily taken aback at the sight of Bill and Fleur. He had known about Percy and Audrey (he was pretty sure based on the twins' description that the woman seated next to Percy was Audrey) and Arthur, but Bill and Fleur were new to the equation.

Fred broke the awkward silence, "Dad, tell Harry what you saw in the Ministry today."

Arthur told Harry about the attack on the Ministry and what he overheard between Lucius and Rookwood. Harry showed some surprise at the news of an attack on the Ministry, but his reaction of the conversation surprised Arthur.

"Thanks Arthur, I didn't know about the raid on the Ministry. Although I'm not surprised Bella would pull such a stunt. As for the conversation you overheard, I'm afraid it is true. Before I go any further, let me be clear to everyone here – your knowledge of that

conversation has put you in great danger should certain people find out that you know including Albus Dumbledore.”

He looked around at the shocked faces and continued, “I will give you all the same choice I gave others. I can fill in the missing pieces of the puzzle, but knowing that information will put you in greater danger. The alternative is that you can choose to be obliviated and not remember the conversation between Lucius and Rookwood or even that I was here.”

Percy looked at Audrey who smiled and nodded to him, “Harry we want to know.”

Bill also felt Fleur squeeze his hand, “We’re in too Harry.”

Arthur looked around at his family – the two young women had already found a place in his heart – and sighed loudly, “Over the past few weeks my life has taken a direction I never thought it would. I don’t recognize my wife and two youngest children and I’ve even been questioning the foundation my marriage was based on. On the bright side,” he smiled at Fleur and Audrey, “I feel like two very nice young women have joined my family – not trying to push anything mind you – and I will always be thankful to Audrey for her part in bringing Percy back into our lives.” He smiled warmly at Audrey.

“Harry,” Arthur continued, “If you can shed some light on this that will allow me to better understand why my world is being turned upside down then please share the information with me. I need to know.”

Harry’s heart went out to Arthur. So many things had happened to him and his family in such a short amount of time. He summoned Jeeves and asked for Sirius’ papers. Jeeves returned a moment later.

“Before I let you read these, I’ll need a Wizard’s Oath from each of you that the contents of these papers will not be discussed with anyone who does not have explicit permission from me or in any locations where there is a chance unauthorized people could overhear.”

One by one everyone gave his or her oath. Harry smiled and continued, "Thank you. I will leave you with these papers and invite you all to dinner around 7pm. Dinner may be a bit late though since I have one other item to attend to. Oh yeah," he remembered as he has handing over the papers, "I hereby give everyone in this room permission to read the papers left to me by my father Sirius Black."

He smiled at the shocked faces of Bill and Fleur as he headed back to the Manor.

/Scene Break/

Narcissa Black was trying to settle in to her room at Potter Manor. Harry had told her about the protections around the Manor and she felt safe for now. She dreaded what would happen when Lucius and the Dark Lord heard about her betrayal.

There was a knock at her door. She opened it and found Harry standing there. "Hello Narcissa, I came to check on you and give you some news. May I come in?"

"Certainly Harry. I'm doing all right so far. I am worried about what will happen if Lucius gets out and the Dark Lord finds out about what I've done."

"Um, well, that's one of the things I wanted to tell you. Apparently Bellatrix staged a raid on the Ministry this evening. Lucius has escaped."

"What? That wasn't supposed to happen." She covered her mouth afraid that she may have let something slip.

"I know it wasn't supposed to happen." He winked at her, "However it has and we have to deal with it. I'm sure Voldemort won't be too happy with him since he lost his wife and his son is not the Black heir."

"No, but that still won't protect me from his vengeance."

“Narcissa, trust me when I tell you that you don’t have to worry about the Dark Lord. “ Seeing her quizzical look he added, “I can’t explain it fully right now, but ask me again after dinner. Why were you looking so sad when I came in?”

“I was thinking about how much I miss Sirius and Andy. I was wondering if you could possibly relay a message for me to her. She probably hates me, but I would very much like to get to know her again. I miss my Sister.”

Harry tilted his mouth in a smirk, “I will relay the message. There is actually someone I want you to meet before dinner. They are at the door. May I let them in?”

He walked over to the door and opened it at Narcissa asked, “Who is it?”

The voice that responded surprised her, “It’s me Cissy.” Harry had opened the door and Andromeda Tonks came in. Narcissa stood in shock as she saw her sister standing there watching her.

“Andy? I’m so sorry. I’ve missed you.”

“And I’ve missed you baby sister.”

Narcissa walked over to her older sister, “I’m so sorry about what happened between us. I ...” She stopped as Andromeda put her hand on her sister’s mouth.

“Don’t say another word like that. I know the situation you were in. I knew what Lucius and Mother were like. I’m just hoping that this means I get another chance to have my sister back.”

Narcissa’s face brightened and she enveloped her older sister in a big hug. Seeing Harry over her sister’s shoulder, Narcissa silently mouthed a “Thank You” before the head of the Black family turned and closed the door.

/Scene Break/

Hermione was waiting for Harry in the hallway. She noticed the smile on his face. He glanced back at the door behind him, "I think we may have to delay dinner by a bit. They have a lot of catching up to do."

"I don't think that will be a problem," she said smiling as she enveloped him in a hug and gave him a tender kiss. "Besides, with half the Weasley's coming now I'm sure the elves could use a bit more time to prepare." She rested her head on his shoulders. The past week had brought about so many changes – the best of all for her was finding the man she loved more than anyone else on the planet had the same feelings for her. They stood there for several minutes just enjoying the feeling of closeness with one another.

/Scene Break/

The dinner was almost over before it had begun. The appearance of Severus Snape had half the people ready to leave and the presence of Narcissa Black alienated most of the other half. Harry had everyone sit down and he explained how Severus and Narcissa came to be his guests. Hermione's parents had decided to have a romantic dinner alone so Harry was able to discuss the Conspiracy freely with everyone.

It seemed that Narcissa was in on the Conspiracy to a point. Lucius had involved her as an intermediary at times between himself and Fudge or Dumbledore. He had never required an oath of secrecy from her since she was his wife and was expected to obey him.

The conversation around the table was very lively and it wasn't until dinner was finished when Bill asked about the prophecy.

"Harry, I read everything you gave us."

Narcissa and the Tonks' looked perplexed. Harry gave them the documents from Sirius giving permission to read them as they all moved into the sitting room.

Bill started again, "The prophecy of the heirs of the founders. Have you figured out who they are? For instance, I suspect you are the heir of Gryffindor, but who are the other three?"

Harry thought for a moment and then summoned Jeeves. He whispered something into the elf's ear and Jeeves disappeared again with a nod.

Harry took a deep breath, "In for a penny, in for a pound," he thought to himself.

"Well, you are right about the heir of Gryffindor. I cast the genealogy spell and I am the heir for Gryffindor." He looked at the women on either side of him and got nods from both of them.

"We also found the heirs of Ravenclaw and Hufflepuff. Those lines went dormant hundreds of years ago as their magic protected the lines. For a long time they were thought to be extinct but their magic brought them back as it sensed the time for the prophecy to be fulfilled. The heir of Hufflepuff is Luna."

There was a look of surprise on a lot of faces – Percy looked at Luna, "But aren't you in Ravenclaw?"

Luna got a dreamy look on her face and said, "Yes. The hat knew who I was but decided that blue was a better colour to ward off Nargles."

Neville, Harry and Hermione had to force themselves to keep a straight face. "Loony" Lovegood only came out when Luna wanted to use her wicked sense of humour and keep people guessing.

Harry coughed, "What Luna is saying is that the founders enchanted the hat to protect their heirs until the time was right. Luna was placed in Ravenclaw because that was the best fit for her other than Hufflepuff. Those of you who were there when I was sorted can attest to the fact that it took the hat a while to sort me. It wanted to put me in Slytherin, but I had already met Draco and I did not want to be in the same house as him. It reluctantly sorted me into Gryffindor."

Narcissa looked very thoughtful throughout the whole conversation. Harry could see her figuring things out. She looked up at him, "What about the other two heirs?"

“Well, the Ravenclaw heir obviously could not be sorted into Ravenclaw. The heir of Ravenclaw is actually a Gryffindor and is none other than Hermione Granger. Rowena Ravenclaw’s line was the last to reassert it’s magic.”

Narcissa wanted to follow this discussion to the end. “So, who is the heir ...”, she stopped and went pale. Those around the table who didn’t know what she had just realized were wondering what would make her stop like that and turn so very pale.

She regained her composure and looked at Harry who was smiling broadly, “You can’t possibly mean that the heir of Slytherin is”

“Me?” said a new voice from the doorway. Everyone turned to look at the newcomer and half the people in the room suddenly looked like they wanted to be somewhere, anywhere other than Potter Manor. However the shock of the experience kept them in their seats.

Harry said, “I’m glad you got my message Tom and were able to break away from your work.” Tom came strolling into the room, “Everyone, I would like you to meet the heir of Slytherin, Tom Marvolo Riddle.”

The reactions around the room were varied:

Narcissa had gone silent again.

Andromeda unconsciously tried to shield Ted.

Bill and Fleur were too stunned to move.

The Twins who had already known this part were staring at the man who had terrorized so many.

Neville managed to remain calm. Luna had spoken to him at length and had promised him quite a snogging session would be in order if his Gryffindor courage showed itself in this situation.

Percy was just stunned while Audrey studied the man she had heard so much about but who remained more of an interesting news item in Canada rather than an actual threat.

Severus looked like the cat that ate the Canary. He didn't know how long he could hold the laughter in.

Tonks and Remus were prepared to a point, but seeing the man in real life was just plain frightening even for a werewolf.

Xenophilius and Augusta looked at Luna and Neville's reaction. He was very proud of his daughter for looking beyond the surface and she was proud of Neville for showing courage to stand up there right now without showing any signs of fear.

Arthur was the first to recover, "Har-Harr-Harry, if you hadn't figured it out yet, that is Lord V-V-Vol-Voldemort."

Harry broke the tension by chuckling. He was soon joined by Hermione, Luna, Severus, and - to some extent - Neville. Tom just continued to look around the room and finally cracked a smile as well.

Harry spoke up, "Tom (a.k.a. Voldemort) is really the heir of Slytherin and is essential to the prophecy. He's been staying here for the past few days trying to piece his life back together. I thought that Dumbledore had manipulated my life, when he did to me is nothing of what he did to Tom."

He looked at Tom and asked, "May I continue?"

Tom, smiled and nodded and with a bow of his head answered, "But of course."

"OK everyone. You've all read what Sirius left me. Now I'm going to give you the rest of the story starting with how Dumbledore has manipulated Tom's and my lives and also everything we've discovered over the past week.

For the next two hours everyone listened to Harry – backed up by Hermione and Luna – as he went through the history of the

Pureblood Conspiracy and how it had affected them. He used the pensieve to show how Tom had been manipulated from a young age and at times even Tom commented on certain situations.

Harry went through what his mother had written to him and also his life at the Dursleys. He went through all of the manipulations throughout his school years culminating in the battle at the Department of Mysteries and the subsequent betrayal by Ronald and Ginevra Weasley. At that juncture, he made a point of looking over at the Weasleys in attendance. "Fred, George, Percy, Bill and Arthur, I know that you didn't have anything to do with this. That is why you are here tonight. I still love and respect all of you and still consider you part of my family."

It was at this point he had to fight off the hugs and kisses from the twins. They finally relented when Hermione threatened to curse their tongues off. It did however serve to break a lot of the latent tension in the room.

The explanation ended with the people who were in attendance at the Will Reading earlier sharing their memories using the pensieve. Arthur shared his memory of the Death Eater raid on the Ministry. Tom was very interested in that and had a very calculating look on his face when he emerged from that particular memory.

The rest of the evening was spent answering questions and talking among one another. Percy and Audrey actually spent a fair amount of time talking to Tom and getting to know him (Audrey's initiative since she did not grow up in fear of a name).

By eleven o'clock, everyone seemed to be talked out. Harry had noticed that many had made the effort to talk to Tom and try to get to know him. It escaped no one's notice how close Harry and Hermione, Neville and Luna and Remus and Nymphadora were. One of the biggest surprises was Severus. He was rarely seen out of the vicinity of the Black sisters. Anyone who had the experience of being a student of Professor Snape was shocked by the smile on the man the whole evening and that he could be polite and actually quite charming when he wanted to be.

The discussion was settling in to that moment of comfortable silence that always occurs at a gathering before people start leaving. Just before the inevitable moment Nymphadora spoke up, "Um, Harry?"

"Yeah Tonks?"

"What now? I mean we have a group of people here who have all been impacted by this conspiracy in some way shape or form. You have people who are part of the Order of the Phoenix, The Ministry, even the Death Eaters ..."

"Not to mention," Interrupted Fred.

"The Head one." Said a smiling George.

Tonks, looked at them with minor annoyance and continued, "Um, yeah. What I'm trying to say Harry is that it doesn't just have to be you four in this. I want to help."

Almost unanimously everyone else pledged their support as well and a willingness to help the Heirs of the Founders. Harry was almost overcome by their offers of allegiance. He looked at Hermione and Luna and they looked touched as well. It was harder to read Tom, but he also looked like he was moved by the show of support.

Harry spoke up, "Thank you. This means a lot to all of us. However it's getting pretty late. Can we meet back here tomorrow at nine pm?"

Everyone agreed and they were all just about ready to go when the twins spoke up, "We need,"

"A name,"

"We mean Dumbledore has,"

"The Order of the Phoenix."

"And Tom has,"

"His Death Eaters."

“No offence.”

“None taken,” Tom said smiling.

“So we thought,”

“We should have”

“A name too.”

Hermione put on her McGonagall imitation, “And do you two have a suggestion?”

“Of course,” they replied in unison, “We think our name should be ...”

/Scene Break/

A half hour later Harry and Hermione were spending some time alone in the sitting room just cuddling and enjoying each other's company after a very long and busy day.

Hermione looked up at Harry, “Tell me the truth, when did you think about the name Fred and George came up with.”

“Well, the more I think it over, I like it.”

“So do I,” she said pulling him into a tender kiss.

A/N – There is a reason I didn't put the name in and it isn't for dramatic effect. As much as I tried, I could not come up with one. So, I'm looking for suggestions and the one I like the best will be in the next chapter.

Chapter 20 – Is Calamari Really Breaded Squib?

Monday morning found many within the British wizarding community contemplating the previous day.

Albus Dumbledore had contacted Fudge the previous evening and had effectively muzzled any new of the Will reading and its contents. It helped that the official reading had been moved up a week without a public notice. Cornelius had readily agreed that they needed to get some sort of control over Potter before the rest of the world found out that he was now officially the head of two old pureblood families.

He had been planning all morning for his meeting with Harry at Grimmauld Place. He knew that trying to exert direct control over the boy was futile. No, he had to reestablish some sort of trust with Harry. Albus would offer him 'exclusive' training over the summer to prepare for his battle with Tom. He would also give him a highly scripted version of events to show him Tom's past and offer Harry the opportunity to go hunting for Tom's horcruxes.

"I've got to get at least some of Harry's trust back before the end of the summer," he muttered to himself. He had to get closer to the boy again. Right now there was no way Harry would have his guard down enough to be able to slip him the potions needed to get him back under control and open to suggestion.

Granger was another problem. How the hell he missed that her friendship with the boy would cause problems was one of his biggest mistakes since Lily Evans. The only way he was able to keep Evans in line was that she respected McGonagall and Minerva was an expert in manipulation. Granger was even more independent. He still didn't know what happened to the Grangers, but he had the feeling Hermione's trust in Minerva had been shaken as well. He had to get her away from Lord Potter-Black.

/Scene Break/

Lucius Malfoy woke up alone in Malfoy Manor. He sat up and groaned with his head in his hands. Yesterday had been one of the worst single days in the history of the Malfoy family since 1435 when

Scorpius Malfoy – a well-known expert in animal husbandry – was found to have taken his vocation too literally. It had been nearly four generations before a Malfoy could sit in the Wizengamot without snickers breaking out and the sound of random moos, oinks and bleating sheep echoing through the chamber.

Now this. Over the past twenty four hours the Malfoy scion had lost a lot of important things in his life – his public standing in the community, a half million galleons, the Black inheritance, and, if Voldemort has his way, his son. I mean really, he wasn't even gone three weeks before Voldemort started getting delusions of grandeur.

"Kill Dumbledore," he shook his head, "what was he thinking? Well at least he's supposed to be gone for another couple weeks. I've got some time to get Draco out the mess he got himself into. I'll talk to Dumbledore after breakfast, he'll know what to do."

He got up and had one of his elves get him dressed. He was going to have a nice breakfast. As he made his way down the stairs, the Dark Mark on his arm began to burn. He grabbed his forearm as the burn suddenly became unbearable. "Oh shit!" he thought, "He's back and his is royally pissed."

Things just got worse – he had to take Draco to Voldemort now before his arm burned off. Lucius Malfoy just surpassed Scorpius. He directed one of the house elves to get Draco ready to leave in five minutes – he figured he had ten minutes before he passed out from the pain in his arm.

He didn't even consider Narcissa's divorce from him to be a problem until later in the day.

/Scene Break/

Harry woke up early on Monday in an unfamiliar situation. He found himself on the sofa in the sitting room. He had been fairly exhausted after the day and remembered cuddling with Hermione once everyone had left. His brain then woke up enough to realize he wasn't alone. He looked down and saw Hermione was still asleep with her head on his shoulder. "I could get used to this," he thought, "it's a

wonderful way to wake up.” He looked at his watch – he still had two more hours before he had to meet Dumbledore and he wasn’t ready to get up just yet.

/Scene Break/

Tom left the Manor in his black cloak and with red eyes blazing. If all went well, this would be his last appearance as the real Voldemort and he was going to make the most out of it.

He arrived at the Death Eater compound unannounced and completely unexpected. Three Cruciatus curses later everyone knew he was back. He was sure one of the new recruits wet himself when he ordered him that he had better get Bella into the study in three minutes or forfeit his life. Under his hood he smiled silently – the poor guy had to face Bella or face me.

He called over another death eater. “Your arm.” The death eater extended his arm to show his Mark. Voldemort put his wand to the Mark and concentrated on Lucius and his son. The death eater in front of him was good. He didn’t even show the pain he must be feeling.

Exactly seven minutes later Lucius and a rather pale Draco arrived.

Voldemort released the unnamed death eater and he managed to make it into the hallway before he collapsed.

“Lucius, I got word you were free. How did you escape the Ministry?”

“Well, my Lord, Bella led a raid into the Ministry and released us.”

Bella walked in at that point having just proved the point that sometimes you do shoot the messenger and took one look at Lucius and pouted whining, “Lucy! I wanted to tell him! It was my raid, you were just part of the spoils.”

Voldemort almost slipped back into Tom as he fought the laugh that wanted to escape as he saw the look on Lucy’s face.

"Bella why did you attack the Ministry. I thought I had instructed you were just to plan."

"I tried, my lord. But it was just so frustrating. It was driving me crazy. I needed Lucy and you didn't say I couldn't do it myself."

"I see, and how many followers did we lose in this raid?"

"One. But I swear his humming put me over the edge!"

"You killed him?"

"Well," Bella put on the face of a puppy who got caught doing something wrong, "we were in this elevator and the music..."

"Enough Bella! I don't wish to hear the details. Go back to your chambers. I will deal with you later."

She turned to leave and started walking toward the door.

"Bella?" She turned around, "It's later. Crucio!"

She screamed as he held her under the curse for a few minutes. She crawled out without a word once he released it.

"Now Draco, tell me how the Will reading went. My sources tell me it was moved to yesterday."

/Scene Break/

Harry and Hermione were just finishing breakfast with her parents and Narcissa. Harry was mentally preparing himself for his meeting with Dumbledore.

"I'm still not sure you should be going alone," Hermione repeated for the sixth time that morning.

"Hermione, you know that I need to do this alone. I need Dumbledore to think that I trust him enough to come alone. I've got to play the

Pureblood game – I'm the head of two major houses and I need to show it. He needs to know he can't force his terms on me anymore."

Before Hermione could object again, Narcissa spoke up, "Hermione, Harry is right. If Harry showed up with other people, it would send the message that he is not secure enough to come alone. If Dumbledore comes with others then he will show weakness so I'm pretty sure he'll come by himself."

Hermione nodded, "I know, it's just I'll be worried. What if Dumbledore has it figured out?"

Harry put his arm around her and pulled her close. "Hermione, that's the risk we are going to have to take until we can get back to the school. We can either choose to hide away for the summer, or we can act like a couple of love struck teenagers who just became rich and independent." His face showed that famous lopsided grin, "That shouldn't be too hard should it?"

Hermione looked at him sternly, "Well, all except for the love struck part."

The lopsided grin turned into a pout. She stuck her tongue out at him and laughed. Hermione's parents laughed as Narcissa made a gagging noise.

"Go on then. Remember you are meeting us at the Leaky Cauldron for lunch?" Hermione and Harry agreed to meet Neville and Luna for lunch and they just wanted to hang out for the afternoon.

"Yes, dear. I remember," Harry drawled out exhaling slowly.

Hermione playfully smacked him in the shoulder. The two of them were giggling. Narcissa was mimicking sticking her finger down her throat.

Harry noticed her this time, "Narcissa, what's gotten into you today? You're reminding me more like Sirius..." he paused.

Hermione saw the look and gave him a hug. Narcissa saw it too and answered, "Harry, Sirius and I were very much alike. Until I got involved with Lucius, I was quite a prankster with my sisters," she saw the look, "yes, even Bellatrix before she went completely loopy. I would like to say that Sirius learned from us, but by the time he was eight, we couldn't get him, but he was good at getting us."

Harry found that being enveloped in Hermione's arms was not conducive to brooding and he brightened up again. He gave her a light kiss and then straightened up again. "Well cousin, I think I will like to get to know the real you."

Harry got up to leave. Hermione got up as well. "I'm going to spend some more time in my new library."

Harry walking quickly away said over his shoulder, "Well, I'll be meeting Luna and Neville for lunch. I'll probably see you in a couple of days." He disappeared before Hermione had a chance to retaliate.

/Scene Break/

"Now Draco, tell me how the Will reading went. My sources tell me it was moved to yesterday."

Draco nodded.

Are you ready to pledge the allegiance of the Black Family?

Draco shook his head, "N-n-n-no."

"No? Draco, do you realize how many people who have tried to go back on a promise to me actually lived through the meeting? I can't recall a single one. However, I will give you the same chance I gave all of them – please explain."

"My Lord," Lucius started and then fell to the floor screaming from one of Voldemort's Cruciatus curses.

"Lucius, I asked Draco, not you. Now Draco, please explain yourself."

“Well, I can’t swear the allegiance of the Black Family because I am not Lord Black.”

“The will reading of the last Lord Black was yesterday but you, Draco, are not Lord Black?”

“Yes.”

“So, Draco, who is currently Lord Black?”

“Harry Potter.”

“Really? How interesting. Now, tell me Draco, how did young Mr. Potter supersede you in the Black Family succession order. Were you not the first in line?”

“I was until the former Lord Black made Harry his son through a blood adoption.”

“I see. Well Draco, would you like the good news or bad news?”

“Um, the good news?”

“The good news is that you will be the first person to break a promise with Lord Voldemort and survive.”

Draco brightened up. “I might make it out of here,” he thought. He spoke again, “And the bad news?”

“Draco, do you remember the last time we talked?”

/Flashback/

“On the fourteenth Sirius Black’s last will and testament will be read at Gringotts. Since he did not have a son, I am next in line for the Head of the House of Black. After I become Lord Black, I will pledge the allegiance of the Black Family to your cause.”

“Draco, your father has let me down a number of times. How can I be sure you aren’t going to let me down here as well? How can I be sure

that you won't use your new title as Lord Black to gain favour with Dumbledore and turn against me?"

Draco thought for a moment and gave his answer to Voldemort.

"I swear a Wizard's oath upon my magic that I will pledge the allegiance of the Black Family to your cause following the reading of Lord Sirius Black's Will, so mote it be."

A glow flowed from Draco's wand over him sealing the oath.

"Very good Draco, I will accept that."

/End Flashback/

"Yes, but the oath was for when I became Lord Black."

"Ah but Draco, your oath only mentioned that you would swear the allegiance following the Will reading. Had you mentioned yourself actually having to be Lord Black then it would be a different story."

"But what does this mean?"

"It means Draco, that your oath is forfeit and I want your magic."

Draco's eyes widened in horror, "Y-y-y-you mean I'll be a filthy squib?"

"I'm not sure about the filthy part Draco, but you will be a squib, so mote it be"

Draco felt intense pain as his own magic destroyed itself to fulfill the wizard's oath. When the pain went away, Draco felt an emptiness inside that he had never felt before. "What did you just do to me?"

Voldemort smiled and evil smile, "Me? I just activated the oath. It was your own magic that did the rest. Go on, try and cast a spell."

Draco whipped out his wand and stopped. There was no rush of power, no warm feeling in his hand. For all intents and purposes it felt like an ordinary stick.

"I can't ... there's no magic. What will I do?" He looked at his father.

Lucius had known this would happen when Draco told him about the oath. He had rather hoped that Dumbledore could come up with something to protect his son or even find some way to get the lordship away from Potter. But this morning when Voldemort summoned him, he knew it would end up like this. The Dark Lord interrupted his train of thoughts.

"Lucius, come here please." Lucius walked over and Voldemort continued, "Lucius, what are the succession law for the House of Malfoy?"

"The head of house must be passed on to a male heir."

"Now, now Lucius, I know you are not saying everything. Is Draco your heir?"

"No."

Draco looked at his father in shock and nearly passed out as Voldemort continued, "And why not?"

"The heir to the Malfoy line must be male and magical."

"Is there a suitable heir to the Malfoy line now?"

"No."

"Well, I guess you and Narcissa have your work cut out for you."

Lucius mumbled something.

"Speak to me properly Lucius," Voldemort snapped as someone correct a three-year-old child.

“Narcissa and I are no longer married. Lord Black cancelled the marriage contract and reclaimed the dowry.”

“Interesting. So Lucius if I understand correctly what you are saying, over the last twenty four hours you have lost your heir, your wife and a good deal of your fortune. Not to mention that you are now an escaped Death Eater and wanted by the DMLE.”

Lucius nodded slowly.

“I think dear Scorpius Malfoy can now rest easy don't you Lucius? You could have prevented all this if you had not been incarcerated in the first place and you were only there because you failed at the simple task of retrieving a prophecy from a bunch of fifth year students.”

Lucius hung his head, “Yes, my lord.”

“Now Lucius, if you want to leave this room alive, you will swear a wizard's oath to me.”

“What oath, my lord?”

“You must swear upon your own life and magic that you will not disown Draco from the family and you will support him and allow him to live in Malfoy Manor.” Voldemort knew that the last two conditions weren't really necessary – Lucius would have abandoned the boy and stricken him from the family records and moved on as Draco Malfoy would have been dead to the magical world. Now, Draco would forever be a Malfoy squib and Lucius' pride would never allow a Malfoy to be seen in a Squib or, heaven-forbid, muggle occupation. No Draco's presence would forever remind Lucius of his failures and Draco would live the rest of his life on the periphery of the magical world he was once a part of.

Lucius, for his part, understood the implications of the oath perfectly. However he had to get out of here alive and regroup with Dumbledore. Maybe Dumbledore could help him arrange a marriage. He swore the oath.

“Go now and leave me to my thoughts.” The two Malfoy’s turned and began to walk out as Voldemort said one final thing, “Oh, one more thing?” Draco and his father turned around. “Draco I release you from your obligation to kill Albus Dumbledore.”

Tom remembered the expression on their faces. “This will be great in the pensieve memory tonight,” he thought as the Malfoys left the room.

Tom composed himself into Voldemort again. He pointed his wand at his throat and after a quick Sonorous charm belted out one word, “Bella!”

/Scene Break/

Harry arrived at Grimmauld place shortly before ten. He had a few minutes before he Dumbledore would be here so he thought he’d check the place out. As he walked in, he noticed the difference immediately. The entire house had been scrubbed, painted and redecorated. Even that ghastly painting was gone. Harry wondered how the goblins had done that. The painting had stubbornly refused to be taken off the wall. Upon closer inspection he smiled and figured it out. “Well,” he thought, “that shows creative thinking. If you can’t take the picture from the wall, just replace the wall.”

Harry noticed how much bigger the house looked unfurnished and cleaned up. It was nothing like the oppressive, dingy residence he had come to know and loathe.

Harry was startled out of his musings by a knock at the door. He went down and opened it to find Dumbledore waiting for him. “Good morning Professor. Won’t you please come in?”

Dumbledore came into the house and stopped as he saw the changes made to the inside of the house. Harry saw the startled look on his face. Albus quickly remembered where he was and why he was there and composed himself and said, “Harry it appears that you have been quite busy.”

Harry gave him a lopsided smirk, but his eyes showed no mirth, "Well, I never really liked this place so I had it cleaned out and renovated last week."

"Last week?"

"Yes after I received Sirius' inheritance."

"When was that?"

"Last week."

Dumbledore knew this was pointless so he put on his best twinkling-eyed grandfather face and tried a new approach.

"Harry, I'm very upset that our relationship has deteriorated. I've only ever wanted you to be happy."

"Merlin!" Harry thought, "How do I respond to a comment like that?" In the next few seconds, many responses came to mind like:

"Oh yes, I was very happy seeing that I'm a masochist with a death wish."

"Happy? As in laughing maniacally as they cart me away in a straight jacket?"

"Did you honestly think I wanted to grow up to be a hermit practicing self-flagellation?"

"Happy? As in Happy to welcome death's embrace?"

But instead he answered with, "I know professor, however it is hard to be happy when you have a reanimated psychopath and his hoard of scary men after you."

"Ah, yes. That is one thing I wanted to talk to you about. I was wondering if you would like to take a more active part in the war which is already waging?"

Harry put on a completely sincere face, "Finally! Yes, what did you have in mind?"

He saw the look of joy in the Headmaster's face. He was glad the he remembered Narcissa's final piece of advice on dealing with Dumbledore. He heard her voice in his head, "Remember Harry, sincerity is the key. If you can fake that you have it made."

"Excellent Harry. Here's what I have planned – I would like to provide you with private training and want you to join me on some excursions."

"Excursions sir? Training?"

"Yes, I will explain the excursions at a later time, and the training will help you when you eventually have to face Voldemort."

"Yes, I think I would like to spend some more time with you." Harry knew now why he could have been sorted into Slytherin, "When can we start?"

"Soon Harry, soon. I'll need to have some way of communicating with you, however it seems that owls cannot find you. If you could only tell me ..."

"I can be reached via Patronus. They are the only form of communication that can get to where I am living. Well, and Hedwig of course."

"Oh, yes, very well. I will be contacting you shortly about that. I believe we also have some other business to discuss namely the continued use of this residence by the Order."

"I've been thinking about that Headmaster and I think my father Sirius would have wanted the Order to continue to use Grimmauld place. However, since this is now my house and I am an emancipated Lord, I will add one condition – that I be allowed to attend Order meetings." Albus started to interrupt but Harry put up his hand and continued, "I'm not looking to become a full member of the Order. Merlin knows I'm not ready for that. However, now that I know the prophecy, I

realize that I need all the information I can get if I am going to defeat the Dark Lord. I would also like the same courtesy extended to Hermione. She will be of age in a little over two months, and we work best as a team. If you do not permit Hermione to attend the meetings, rest assured that I would tell her everything. Her trustworthiness is not up for discussion. There is no one else who I trust more than my best friend."

"Harry, I cannot take the request you've made lightly. I will think this over and discuss it with the Order at our next meeting tomorrow night. I think we shall have that meeting at Hogwarts and I will present your offer to them. Is this acceptable to you?"

"Yes Headmaster, it is. If you decide to take me up on my offer then I will have the Fidelius charm recast on the house and with a secret keeper of my choosing. If you choose to reject my offer then this house will most likely go to a member of the Black Family."

"Who is interested in the house?"

"I will not disclose this information since it is an internal Black Family matter," Harry said with an unmistakable air of finality.

"Harry I can see that you have grown more mature over the past few weeks. I only hope that by working together to defeat Voldemort, we can rebuild our relationship."

"Well Professor, I am willing to try if you are willing to trust me with information I need to have and provide me with enough information to make my own decisions, not just enough to convince me of yours."

Albus fought down his anger as he thought, "Make this kid a Lord and he thinks he can make demands of me as an equal? I can't wait for Riddle or Potter to eliminate one or the other which will allow me to easily get rid of the survivor." He used his Occlumency to calm down.

"I will try my best Harry. However there will be some circumstances where the information I have will be so sensitive that I will share it with no one. I'm sure you understand."

Harry nodded while thinking, "Yeah no one except Malfoy and Fudge."

Harry looked at his watch, "Well Headmaster it is nearly 11 am. Where has the time gone? I'm needed elsewhere so unless you have anything more to discuss, I await your decision on my offer."

"Certainly Harry. Have a good day too. I don't suppose you will tell me where you will be going? We need to have the Order around to protect you."

"Professor, I am very well protected and I'm sure that if required the Order will be able to protect me. However I have found a certain enjoyment in my new-found freedoms and I think I will keep it this way."

"As you wish Harry. I'm just trying to look out for your best interests."

They had reached the door; Harry opened the door for Albus. "I appreciate your concern for my well-being Have a good day Professor."

Albus bid him a good day and he apparated back to Hogsmeade where his walk back to the castle was full of mental cursing of the "boy-who-lived". As he got to his office he was surprised to see Severus waiting for him.

/Scene Break/

Harry meanwhile was chuckling to himself. He had pulled it off. Speaking to no one in particular he said, "Yeah the Order does protect me – we all protect each other. The Order Eaters that is."

He left Grimmauld place and faded away.

/Scene Break/

"Bella!"

She heard his forceful voice and it sent shivers of pleasure down her spine. She got up and found she was shaking. "He always has this effect on me," she thought with a look of immense pleasure on her face.

She never considered that the shakes might be caused by the short-term nerve damage from the Cruciatus curse she was under earlier.

She made her way back to his study.

As she approached her Lord she was ready for anything. He looked down at her.

"Bella, I'm very displeased with you. But alas, I think I gave you a task you could not complete. Your arm please."

Bella extended her arm and exposed the Dark Mark. She reveled in the pain as her master placed his wand on it.

/Scene Break/

Lucius dropped the cup of tea he was holding as his arm started burning for the second time that morning.

"Merde! Not again! What the hell does he want now?"

He quickly donned his robes and disappeared.

/Scene Break/

Lucius came walking at a brisk but unhurried pace (something purebloods do very well when they are whipped but don't think anyone else knows) back into the study. He looked at Bella who was touching her arm with a look of longing. "You summoned me, my lord?"

"Yes Lucius, now that Draco can not fulfill his duties," He saw Bella's quizzical look, "since he is now a squib, and Bella does not have the knack for planning, I need to reassign our two major projects. Lucius, you will plan the takeover of the Ministry, Bella, you seem more to like

action – assemble a team to plan for a kill Dumbledore. Just don't try to attack Hogwarts – kill him elsewhere.”

Tom noticed the look of shock on Lucius face and knew what the elder ferret was thinking – Albus may have heard of Draco's assignment and not taken it seriously. But now that Bella and top Death Eaters were on the hunt, he would have to be very careful.

With that Voldemort announced, I must find Severus and get back to our mission. And with that, Voldemort was gone.

/Scene Break/

Back at Malfoy Manor, Draco sat pondering his fate. He had been trying to write a letter to his mother – perhaps she could help him. He needed to get in touch with Potter – and get just close enough to kill him.

A/N – I want to thank PK Fan for the excellent suggestion.

Chapter 21 – The (Hor)Crux of the Matter

“Severus this is a surprise,” said Dumbledore as he invited the potions professor into his office, “I thought you would be gone for at least another week.”

“Early this morning the Dark Lord announced we were coming back to England. I have to meet him shortly to continue our mission.”

“Is there any way you can tell me what this mission is?”

“No, he made me take a special Wizard’s oath just before we left.”

“Any idea why he needed to come back this morning?”

“He wanted to speak with Draco and Bella.”

“Any idea what he wanted them for?”

Severus took a breath and there appeared to me a look of regret on his face, “Apparently Draco swore a Wizard’s oath on his magic to pledge the allegiance of the Black Family to the Dark Lord’s service. He found out last night that the Will had been read early.”

“How did he find out?”

“Do you think he confides that type of information in me or anyone else for that matter?”

Albus ignored the impudent response, “I fear for young Draco’s life.”

“Anyone summoned to the Dark Lord in the mood he was in has reason to fear for their life. However if Draco truly pledges the allegiance of the Black Family to the Dark Lord he may even get his Dark Mark.”

“I’m afraid Draco will not be able to live up to the oath he gave,” he saw Snape’s confused look, “Harry Potter is the new Lord Black. He underwent a blood adoption ritual and is now recognized as Sirius’ son.”

Snape looked angry, "Now the little brat will be even more angry and insufferable. A Lord? For Merlin's sake! He'll be strutting around like a peacock in full rut. He will probably expect everyone to bow down and kiss his a..."

"SEVERUS!" Dumbledore interrupted his rant, "That is enough. I know your feelings about the boy but I would appreciate if you would not use that type of language around me. I will need your assistance in getting control of Lord Potter-Black, but..."

"Potter-Black?"

"Yes, once he was made Lord Black he was emancipated and received the title of Lord Potter after his parents' will was executed."

Severus looked murderous. Inside behind his Occlumency shields he was laughing hysterically.

"Like I was saying, I'll need your assistance. I had hoped to get Harry to marry Ginevra Weasley, however his appearance at the Will reading and the assumption of his titles allowed him to cancel that. In fact he has started another relationship which may prove to be disruptive to my plans."

"Who would be interested in Potter? He's arrogant, moody, impulsive, short tempered and has a knack for getting himself into dangerous situations. Not even that mudblood Granger would be stupid enough to," He looked at Albus' expression, "Its Granger isn't it?"

Albus nodded. "This is why I need your assistance Severus. We need to be able to separate Harry and Hermione. Together they will be too strong to have any influence over. I need two batches of love potion brewed. One must be for Harry and keyed into Miss Weasley and the other for Hermione keyed into young Ronald."

Severus nodded curtly, "I will see to it once I return."

"Return?"

“The dark Lord only came back to talk to Draco and Bella, Then we are off again.”

“Any idea where?”

“He mentioned Poland, Romania, Ukraine and perhaps Siberia. I believe we are trying to get backing of the Werewolf clans and vampire covens.”

“This is something I feared he may do. Please try and gather as much information for the Order that you can and report to us as soon as it is safe to do so.”

The Potions Master nodded curtly. He said goodbye to the Headmaster and left quickly with his robes billowing behind him. Just as he was about to leave, he noticed the Headmaster had turned and was heading back to his room. Severus quickly and silently cast a series of minor wandless spells and charms at Dumbledore and then proceeded to make his way out of the castle. Once outside the grounds he allowed himself a smile as he apparated away. If anyone had been around to listen they may have heard him say, “Tag. You’re it.”

/Scene Break/

Amelia Bones arrived at her office on Monday morning to find that there had been an attack on the Ministry and several of the on-duty Aurors were either killed or wounded. She wasn’t sure what pissed her off more – the fact that the Death Eaters attacked the Ministry and released the prisoners or that Fudge was suppressing all information about it and that included not alerting her last night.

The Dark Lord now had most of his Inner Circle back. They needed to get them back into custody as soon as possible. The problem was Fudge – he seemed to be trying to stymie her investigations at every turn. Amelia knew that Fudge owed a lot of his power to Malfoy, but she didn’t think that he would blatantly interfere with an investigation.

She needed a way to keep an eye on Fudge. It would have to be discrete and she would need someone she could trust without

question. She furrowed her face in concentration and her eyebrows shot up as she got the answer. She quickly grabbed the report from the battle in the Department of Mysteries a few weeks ago. Maybe it was time she finished her own inquiry on this. She circled two names on the report and called her assistant in. Putting on her sternest 'Head of the DMLE' face she asked him to summon those two people to her office.

/Scene Break/

Nymphadora Tonks and Remus Lupin were enjoying breakfast together. Both were the happiest they could remember being in a long time. Following the meeting they had spent the rest of the evening at her flat talking about their lives and dreams. It was not surprise that Remus spent the night and that they both fell asleep exhausted.

"Moony?" Tonks asked to get his attention. She had taken to calling him by that name. He looked up at her with a smile on his face, "Do you want to move in together? I understand if you don't, but ..." she was interrupted as he came over and kissed her.

"I think it's a great idea. Why don't we look for a new place together?" he said looking into her eyes.

She smiled a great big smile and hugged him tighter. Just as she was about to speak, a familiar (to her) voice came from her fireplace, "Auror Tonks, are you home?"

She walked over to the fireplace tightening her dressing gown, "Yes Albert I'm here."

"Madame Bones would like to see you immediately."

This was unexpected. "Do you know what it's about?"

"It's about the events in the Department of Mysteries in June. She's asked me to call Auror Shacklebolt as well."

"OK. I just have to get dressed. I can be there in 15 minutes."

“I’ll let her know. Just let me warn you Tonks, she’s not in a good mood right now.”

Albert’s face disappeared from her fireplace.

Remus saw a look of concern on Nym’s face. “Are you worried about the meeting?”

“Not sure. I expected her to be talking to us sooner or later about it. I’ve always had a great relationship with her since I joined the Auror Academy. She saw I was being picked on and took me under her wing and taught me the ropes about being a witch in a wizard’s profession. I trust her completely. But if she’s pissed,” she shook her head, “just let me say I’ve seen senior aurors get a reprimand by her that left them shaking and close to tears.”

She walked back to the bedroom and continued speaking as she was getting dressed, “I guess I just have to go and get it over with. Moony. If you have nothing else on your plate today, start looking for a place to live. If I can get a day off this week we’ll do something really special.” She said the last part as she walked out the bedroom in her auror robes. She walked up to Remus and looked deep into his eyes giving him what she hoped was a very sultry look.

Remus coughed and proceeded to ask, “And what would that be?” His pulse quickened and he could feel his blood pressure rising.

She hugged him tighter and put her lips to his ear and said in a low, sexy voice, “Well, I’d like to try something you’ve never done before.”

Remus felt warm all over. He anxiously asked, “What would that be?” He was excited – they had already tried many things over the past few days.

She felt his reaction. Continuing with the sexy voice she said, “Well, I’ve never really done this with a man before and I really think I would like to do it with you. Promise me you’ll like it.”

Remus was really excited (and I mean really excited) now, "I've loved everything we've done together so far. You've got me going spare right now. What is it?"

"Well, on our next free day together the two of us are going to ..." she paused and kissed his ear.

He moaned. This was too much. "What are we going to do? Please, tell me."

She pulled back to face him and looked him straight in the eyes lovingly and said, "We are going to spend an entire day buying a whole new wardrobe for you. Bye." With that she kissed his nose and skipped to the fireplace and flooed to the Ministry.

Remus was left stunned and scared. He didn't like shopping for clothes to begin with. Now he was going to be in for a long day if Tonks put as much energy and enthusiasm into shopping as she did with everything else.

/Scene Break/

Severus arrived back at the guesthouse to find Tom already there. Tom looked up as he came in, "How did your meeting with Dumbledore go?"

"As expected. He now thinks we are after the support of werewolves and vampires," he said with a smirk, "I also managed to cast those spells and charms on him."

Tom chuckled, "Then Albus is in for a very hard time."

/Flashback/

Tom and Severus were getting ready to leave that morning. The previous day Tom had him practice a series of simple charms and spells until Severus was able to cast them quickly, silently and wandlessly.

"Tom, what will these do? Won't Dumbledore notice?"

“No, they are my own invention. Each is benign and almost undetectable. However, together they interact and can be used to track a person very effectively. However unlike traditional tracking spells, this one is nearly impossible to detect as such.”

“Impressive. But why do you want to track him? Why take the risk?”

Tom smiled a mischievous smile, “Well, you know that Draco will lose his magic today right?”

Severus nodded.

“I’m going to give Bella his previous assignment.”

Severus burst out laughing. Once he calmed himself he asked, “You mean that Bella is going to be able to track Dumbledore?”

Tom answered with a smile, “I’ll tell her to stay away from him at Hogwarts – I don’t want any damage done to the castle. I’m not sure if she can take him down, but he’s going to get very paranoid when she starts showing up every time he leaves Hogwarts.”

/End Flashback/

“How did everything go with Draco?”

“The new Malfoy squib? Pretty much as expected. I’ll share the memory tonight. Now, you need to get to Switzerland. Do you have the passwords and account numbers memorized?”

Severus repeated them back to Tom for the twentieth time. Once Tom nodded his satisfaction Severus left to retrieve the horcruxes.

/Scene Break/

Tonks sat nervously outside front of her boss’s office. Kingsley had gone in ten minutes ago and she had heard Amelia yelling before it was cut short by a very obvious silencing spell. Albert looked over at

her and smiled weekly. He had never known the Director to be so pissed off at anything before.

A few minutes later the door opened and a visibly shaken Kingsley came out. He nodded once to Tonks and left very quickly. "What the hell happened in there?" she thought.

Albert disturbed her from her thoughts, "Auror Tonks? The Director will see you now." He had a look of sympathy on his face as he saw her walk into the office. The Director and this Auror were very good friends but he wasn't sure if that would be the case after this meeting. One thing was for certain – he was glad the silencing charms were still in place.

/Scene Break/

Severus appeared in the 'Straße des magischen Handels' in Geneva. He made his way out and proceeded to the address in muggle Geneva provided by Tom.

As he got to the bank he was struck by the fact that the building looked nothing like a Bank. Gringotts always made its presence known with large and imposing buildings. In London, most of the banks shared many of the same characteristics so that you could tell it was a bank even if you didn't know which bank it was. But here in Geneva, discretion was the order of the day. There was nothing to distinguish this as a bank as opposed to any other office building. Severus knew that most of the workings were underground. He made sure the address was the correct one, ran through the passwords and account numbers, and went inside.

/Scene Break/

"Good morning Director. You wanted to see me?" Tonks said this with a noticeable hint of trepidation.

"Auror Tonks. Please have a seat." Amelia said with a stern voice. She needed to find out where Tonks loyalties were. Kingsley had shown he was loyal to Dumbledore and his group. He was now on his way with an assignment to be the next secretary for the muggle

Prime Minister. She looked at her friend and continued, "Tonks, I'm looking into the battle in the Department of Mysteries, specifically your role in that battle. Now, based on the testimony already given, I believe I have a clear picture of the events – to a point. I'm pretty sure Dumbledore left a few points out of his report and he has effectively blocked access to the students who were present. The two people he can't block access to are the two Aurors who were somehow involved."

She paused for dramatic effect and let her words sink in before she continued, "Now, I just finished interviewing Auror Shackbolt and his answers were, shall we say, less than satisfactory to me."

Tonks swallowed nervously but kept eye contact with Amelia.

Amelia softened her tone slightly and used her familiar name for Tonks, "Nym, we've been close for years. I value our friendship. However this involvement with an outside group is disturbing. I need to know what is going on."

Tonks looked at the older woman and began to speak, "Director – Amelia – I was approached by Kingsley last year a few days after the Triwizard tournament. He explained to me how Dumbledore had told him that Voldemort was back and the story made sense. What didn't make sense was the Minister's reaction. He just ignored Dumbledore's warnings and never even tested the validity of Harry Potter's claims. The Prophet was already printing articles discrediting Dumbledore and Potter. Over the next couple of days I went through the investigation myself and I was surprised how little investigation actually took place. You've read the file – Fudge had Barty Crouch Jr. kissed before he could be properly questioned, he ruled out questioning Potter or viewing his pensieve memories, he even had the senior auror on scene tamper with evidence by removing all traces of the portkey charm from the Triwizard Cup. All of this was documented and then the records were sealed."

Amelia asked the first question that came to mind, "How did you get your hands on the file?" She gasped as she saw Minister Fudge now sitting across from her wearing Nym's clothing. Tonks changed back after a minute.

“That’s how.” She saw Amelia start to get angry and continued before the older woman said anything, “My parents survived the last time Voldemort was in power. My father is a muggle-born wizard and my mother’s pureblood family disowned her for that. I’m a half-blood and a metamorphagus – an abomination in pureblood eyes. I needed to know if Voldemort was back. If he was, my family was in danger and I made a vow to myself to do everything I could to protect them. If that meant bending a few rules in a Ministry that was avoiding the threat and endangering the lives of other so be it. The one thing that pushed me over the edge was that I saw the Minister and Lucius Malfoy having lunch three days after the tournament. It was then that I realized that the Minister would never reveal the truth.”

Amelia sat back in her chair. She had come close to arresting Tonks at the revelation she impersonated the Minister to look at confidential files. However Nym’s explanation of her reasons and the passion and determination she displayed reminded Amelia of why she took Nym under her wing in the first place. She remembered Voldemort’s first rise to power and the friends and family she had lost. She could not find it within herself to punish the young auror sitting in front of her. The other thing that was not lost on Amelia was the fact that Tonks could say Voldemort without the slightest flinch – a trait that immediately brought Tonks into even higher esteem with the Director.

Tonks continued, “So after that I contacted Kingsley and joined Dumbledore’s group. They were the only people I knew who wanted to fight against the Dark Lord.”

“Nym, I need to know where your loyalties lie. Are you loyal to the Ministry or Dumbledore?”

“Neither.”

Of all the possible answers, Amelia was not expecting this one. Tonks, on the other hand felt like she was in a maze of her own. She valued her friendship with Amelia and, if her suspicions were correct, the Director could be a welcome ally of her new organization.

“Let me explain. I joined the Aurors because I wanted to learn how to defend myself and defend the people who could not defend themselves. I wanted to make a positive difference in this works and put my unique talents to good use. What I read in those files destroyed my trust in the Minister and thus the Ministry for as long as he is in power. I joined Dumbledore’s group to fight for what I believed in. However over the past year we have not accomplished anything and Dumbledore seemed to focus all of our efforts on keeping Harry Potter isolated. The obsession with Harry got me worried about Dumbledore. His acceptance of the Minister and their continued working relationship over the past year even when the Minister was openly discrediting him got me questioning the dear old ‘Leader of the Light’.”

“In answer to your question though, I am loyal to my friends and family. I will not sit back and allow our society to be manipulated and destroyed. Amelia, I consider you my friend but I need to know what you are thinking.”

Amelia didn’t know what to think. If she were to follow the rulebook, she should either be firing Tonks right now at the very least or charging her with treason and sending her to Azkaban to await trial at the very worst. However, this young auror – her friend – showed a determination and drive similar to her to dig for information and the truth. Nym had already observed that Fudge was friendly with a suspected Death Eater and the Leader of the Light. Amelia had harbored suspicions about that as well, but without having people to trust she could not afford to move on her own.

At the beginning of this meeting she had set out to determine whether she could trust Tonks. She made her decision on that. “Nym, I need your help and I think you are one of the very few people I can trust with this. Fudge is actively covering things up. There was a Death Eater raid on the Ministry last night and they freed our prisoners. There is no news about it because Fudge is covering it up. He’s effectively stopping any official investigations I order. I need to know why. If I can make a case, I will bring it to the Wizengamot to have him thrown out. I would like to ask you – off the record of course – if you would be able to do some covert investigation for me. I need to know what is going on and who is behind it.”

Tonks sat back in thought. She knew from Harry's documents that the Bones family was not part of the Conspiracy. Amelia would be a great ally for the Order Eaters and was a very high profile person in the Ministry with a good public reputation. She was also a very good friend. Nym made her decision.

"Amelia, I can help you. There is someone who already has all the information you are looking for. Let me arrange a meeting."

"Who is it?"

"I can't tell you right now." She saw a worried look appear on the older woman's face, "Don't worry. I'm not going to do anything to cause you harm. You are my friend and that means a lot to me. I'm really unable to give you the information. I'll get in contact with the person who can and I will let you know where we will meet."

Amelia nodded her head in agreement. She trusted this young woman in front of her. "There's just one more thing Nym. We need a cover story for you. I can't have sent Kingsley out with his tail between his legs and then have the two of us leave smiling."

"I've got an idea. How about a suspension without pay?"

"That would work. Are you sure you would be OK?"

"I recently came into a fair amount of money when Lord Black's will was read and ... what's wrong?" Tonks noticed Amelia had a strange look on her face.

"You said 'Lord Black' right?"

"Yes."

"As in 'Lord Sirius Black'?"

"Yes, he was my cousin."

“Well then, how come the will of an ancient pureblood family was executed and there were no public notices or a story in the Prophet?”

“I would imagine that Fudge and Dumbledore do not want the identity of the new Lord Black widely known.”

“And who would this new Lord Black be?”

“Well, it was supposed to be Draco Malfoy. However Sirius performed a blood adoption and the title passed to his new son. His son used to be his godson and is now known as Lord Potter-Black.”

“Harry Potter?”

“Yes.”

“But why would Fudge and Dumbledore try to hide this information.”

“Because publicly it is easier to control and report on the boy-who-lived than Lord Potter-Black. You just can’t go around slandering the head of two pureblood houses.”

“I see what you mean. Wait a sec, you said two houses?”

“Yes, Sirius also emancipated Harry. Once that happened the Potter will was executed and he became Lord Potter as well.”

“Well, you’ve given me a lot more information to dwell on. Please set up your meeting as soon as possible.”

They both got up and headed to the door. Nym changed her hair to disheveled mousy brown and her face looked like she had been crying.

She followed Amelia through the door and heard the Director say, “Albert, please put Auror Tonks on suspension from duty without pay for one month.”

As a distraught-looking Tonks left, Amelia instructed Albert that she was not to be disturbed under any circumstances. She went back into her office and closed the door deep in thought.

The wizarding world was on the brink of another change and she was convinced the new Lord Potter-Black would be at its nexus. She needed to prepare. She went over to the private floo in her office and called home.

“Susan are you there?”

“Yes Auntie. Is something wrong?”

“No dear. Can you please come through? I need to talk to you.”

A few seconds later the fire flared and Susan stepped out.

“What do you need to talk about?”

Amelia smiled warmly at her niece, “Have a seat. I want you to tell me about Harry Potter.”

/Scene Break/

Neville and Luna were enjoying their morning spending time together in Diagon Alley holding hands, sharing the odd kiss and just taking in the sights. Neville had never felt so good. He had a newfound confidence in his own abilities and the fact that he was in the company with a very pretty witch bolstered his ego as well.

They were in Flourish and Blotts when they finally saw their favourite purveyor of misinformation and innuendo – Rita Skeeter. They saw their chance to put their part of the plan into motion.

Luna turned to Neville kissed him passionately. She then spoke up very loudly, “Neville, it’s getting close to noon. Remember we have a lunch date.”

“Right sweetie. We have to meet up with Harry and Hermione.”

Bingo! At the sound of those two names Rita looked up at the couple and smelled a story. She maid up her mind to tail the couple and see what she could find out.

/Scene Break/

Severus emerged from the bank with a briefcase in his hand. Why it had to be a pink aluminum briefcase he did not know but apparently the bankers (or wankers in his opinion) did not have any others available. To top it all off, he could not risk charming it to another colour because of its contents.

“Oh well so much for being inconspicuous,” he thought as he made his way back to the Straße des magischen Handels and from there back to England.

/Scene Break/

The lunchtime crowd at the Leaky Cauldron was not as big as normal. Business had begun to drop off since it was confirmed that Voldemort was truly back. Almost all the people were nervous – those who had survived the last time were busy looking around and bracing themselves for a Death Eater attack and those who were too young the last time were feeding off the paranoia of their elders. In fact the calmest people in the whole place were a young man with black hair and the couple he had just greeted. Harry sat back down as Neville and Luna took their seats.

“Hi Harry, where’s Hermione?” Luna chimed in here sing song voice.

“She went to visit her new library this morning.”

Neville looked up to see Hermione sneaking up on Harry from behind, “Well it’s still a bit early. She’ll be here.”

Harry laughed, not knowing the Hermione was right behind him, “Yeah mate, after a search and rescue team drag her away from the books ... OW” Hermione swatted him playfully in the back of the head.

Harry was worried until he saw the smile on her face. He got up and wrapped his arms around her and gave her a long heartfelt kiss. Now it was her turn to be caught off guard. "Hello beautiful. How was your morning?"

"Enlightening. I always enjoy having the time to read without prats around to pester me," she retorted. They all laughed as the couple sat down.

They made small talk and talk in very general terms about their morning. Shortly after they ordered, they heard a voice that – while not entirely unexpected – carried the threat of ruining the meal. "Well Harry. Long time no see."

"Hello Rita. Come to misquote me on something?"

"Harry do you have to be so rude? I just wanted to say hello."

"Hello then Rita. I assume you remember Hermione Granger and her entomology pursuits?" Hermione flashed Rita and evil grin and a small wave of her fingers. Rita's smile faded for a moment and then was back in full force.

"And these are my friends Neville Longbottom and Luna Lovegood."

Neville said hello to Rita while Luna spoke up, "I've always wanted to meet you Miss Skeeter. I'm a freelance reporter myself."

Rita looked at the blonde teenager, "Is that so dear? Have you had anything published in the Prophet? I can't seem to remember any of your articles." The condescending tone was not lost on anyone.

Luna was not fazed at all, "My stories have been published – just not in the Prophet. I find that it's become to complacent in reporting the news."

Rita's ire and interest were piqued, "Complacent?"

"Yes. The Prophet just seems to print articles handed to them by the Ministry. Take last year for example. The entire last year has been

spent with the Prophet being the Minister's mouthpiece for the slanderous attacks on Harry Potter and our Headmaster for the simple reason they told the truth. No investigative reporting was done, just reprints of what was fed by the Ministry to your paper." Rita was about to interrupt as Luna continued. "Its endemic to the whole organization. Why just once look at today's paper tells you how much they care about actually getting the story. I mean one of the oldest pureblood family's gets a new Head and the Prophet doesn't even mention it. You probably don't even know who the new Lord Black is and you call yourself a reporter?"

"Are you telling me that the last Lord Black's will was executed yesterday?"

"Yes. And is it not pureblood tradition to announce the new head of a pureblood family especially one as prominent as the Black's?"

Rita was not used to this type of situation. The damn girl had put her on the defensive. "Yes, it is tradition. I was not even aware that Lord Black's will was being read. There were no notifications sent to the Prophet."

Luna barged right in, "well, that should be a story in itself. Why wasn't the will reading announced? Who is the new Lord Black? Will he exercise his seat in the Wizengamot? Don't you think those sound like questions a real reporter would chase down?"

Rita was offended by the slight and excused herself quickly. She had a story to pursue.

Once she left, the four teens broke into giggles. Hermione looked at Luna and said, "Great job Luna. I was afraid I'd have to get my bug jar out again. Did you see the look on her face, she is going to track down the identity of Lord Black."

Luna blushed slightly at the praise and even more so when Neville leaned over and kissed her on the cheek. Harry spoke up, "A lot of people want to keep that will a secret for as long as possible. I think that secret's days are numbered. Ragnok is ready with our scripted

answer should she enquire there. The best thing is that we can just sit back and wait.”

At that point, the food arrived and the teens ate their lunch engaging in more small talk.

Once lunch was over they walked to Florean's for dessert and then back to Potter Manor. They wanted to see if Severus had retrieved the Horcruxes successfully.

/Scene Break/

Rita apparated straight to the Ministry and headed to the Department of Records. When she got there she filled out the required forms and waited almost an hour before being told that all enquiries regarding the new Lord Black were denied since the Minister and the Chief Warlock of the Wizengamot sealed the records.

Frustrated she apparated to the offices of the Daily Prophet and scoured the genealogy records of the Black family. From this she found two startling bits of information. The first was the records showed that Sirius Black was Lord Black. She had heard rumors that he died in the Ministry of Magic fighting alongside you-know-who. The second thing she found out was that the first male heir in line for the title Lord Black was a Draco Malfoy.

She tried getting in touch with the Malfoy residence by floo and was constantly rebuked by the house elves. Apparently no one was home who could answer the call.

As a last ditch effort she walked across to Gringotts to see what information she could find there. She approached the head teller and asked to speak to the Goblin in charge of the Black account.

Griphook walked out to the lobby and escorted Rita back to his office. “To what to I owe this visit today Miss Skeeter. Why the interest in the Black Family fortune.”

“Master Griphook,” – she knew how to talk to the goblins with respect – “it has come to my attention that there is a new Lord Black. Can you shed some information?”

Griphook assumed an angry demeanour, “Miss Skeeter, our customer records are confidential especially for a valued client like Lord Potter-Black. Now, I insist that you go and ask no more questions – unless you want the guards to attack you.”

Rita had been on the wrong end of their weapons before and knew that it was not the place to be. Besides she had the information she needed. When she got back to her desk she pieced together the bits of information and a story started to form in her mind:

Harry Potter is now Lord Potter-Black.

Fudge and Dumbledore don't want anyone to know this.

The young Malfoy was supposed to be the first in line for the title of Lord Black. How did Harry get it?

It wasn't much, but Rita never get the lack of facts or hard evidence get in the way of a good story.

/Scene Break/

The four teens walked out of the manor to the most secluded guesthouse. Tom had noticed them through the window and had opened the door for them as they arrived. The first thing they saw when they arrived was Severus in a muggle suit with his hair pulled into a ponytail. They tried to suppress their urge to laugh as much as they could but there were still grunts and squeaks coming out.

Severus just shook his head and said to them, “I had to pass for muggle in order to get these.” He lifted up the briefcase.

The sight of the pink aluminum briefcase cause the teens to lose all self control and they burst out laughing. Severus handed tom the

briefcase and went to his room to change back into some comfortable robes.

Tom set the briefcase on the table and opened it. Inside were six decks of playing cards. Harry raised an eyebrow, "Playing cards Tom?"

"Well, I thought I was gambling with my soul. I even had another deck on me the night I came for you."

The teens groaned at the bad pun on 'gambling'.

Hermione asked, "How can you tell if they are still intact?"

"There is a spell. Watch this." He started waving his wand and muttering an incantation. Slowly the card decks started to glow blue and then bright red.

He was interrupted by a scream of pain and as he looked up he saw Harry passed out on the floor. They all stood in shock as they saw a bright red glow around Harry's scar.

"This," Tom said in an understated tone, "could be a problem."

A/N – As always I appreciate the reviews and any suggestion you have are always welcome.

The street name in Geneva is German for "street of magical commerce." I thought the Swiss wizards would use a pretty boring and functional name.

Chapter 22 – I've Got You Under My Skin

Hermione rolled her eyes at Tom and started yelling at him, "Could be a problem? Aren't you the master of understatement? If I'm figuring this out correctly you made Harry a Horcrux!"

Tom turned to the irate girl, "Indeed. I had prepared myself to create one out of Harry's death. I had even purchased a special deck of cards ..."

"Screw your cards!" Hermione was just getting started now, "What are we going to do about the fragment of your soul lodged in Harry?"

Luna came over and put her hand on Hermione's shoulder. "Hermione, please calm down. Let's wake Harry up and try to figure something out."

Hermione stopped in mid-rant and looked down at her boyfriend who had been unconscious since Tom cast the Horcrux-revealing spell. She flicked her wand out of her holster and "enervated" him.

Harry opened his eyes and the first thing he saw (really the only thing) was Hermione's worried face hovering above his and his peripheral vision block by a cascade of brown hair. Taking quick stock of the situation he could figure out he was lying down on something hard, Hermione's face was inches from his, his scar hurt like hell, Hermione had the most gorgeous eyes, he could not remember why he was in this position, Hermione's lips looked very kissable, and the rest of his body seemed to feel OK.

He noticed from Hermione's facial expression that she looked worried about him. He knew it was about him in particular since she had a special "worried" face when she worried about him. He quickly did the first thing that came to his mind – he wrapped his arm around her and pulled her down to kiss her. He knew he did the right thing when she responded rather enthusiastically.

Hermione was overjoyed when Harry opened his eyes and when he pulled her into a kiss she temporarily forgot about everything else.

That was until she heard a very Familiar voice say “Potter, Granger, please contain your displays of affection to someplace private.”

Both of them turned and looked at Severus who was trying – and not succeeding – to contain his laughter. Neville and Luna were giggling.

Blushing madly, Harry reluctantly let Hermione get up and she helped him to his feet. “What happened?”

Before Hermione could get warmed up, Tom started talking, “It seems that I created a Horcrux the night I tried to kill you.”

“So there’s a missing deck of cards?”

“No. It appears that when my curse rebounded off of you and hit me it split my soul and transferred it to you.” He noticed Harry’s confused look, “Harry. You are the horcrux.”

“Oh.” He went pale. “No problem – how do we get it back to you?”

“Well, I’m not sure. Finding anything about horcruxes is virtually impossible. In all my study on the subject, I did not come across any recorded case of a living object let alone a human being used as a horcrux. This is probably the first time it’s ever been done.”

“Great. Another way I’m unique. I guess I should be expecting it by now. I guess this explains our “special” connection.” He paused, deep in thought. Suddenly he looked very angry, “The old bastard knew.”

Hermione looked over at him, “What do you mean?”

“Well, I bet that he knows that Tom made horcruxes. That’s why he wasn’t too surprised when I explained the diary to him in second year. I bet he cast the revealing spell on me after my parents died. It explains why he has locked me away for the past few years and gone out of his way to make sure for the most part we had crappy Defense teachers.”

Severus, Luna and Tom got looks of understanding on their faces – they saw where Harry was going. Hermione had not quite figured it out and Neville looked completely lost.

Harry continued, “Dumbledore knows about the Horcruxes – or at least the decoy ones. He even dropped a hint that he might want me to help him hunt them. He needs to make sure they are destroyed. Then with one left,” Harry pointed to himself, “he’ll send me out unprepared to face Voldemort and get myself and the remaining horcrux killed. I bet he would be counting on Voldemort being weakened by the fight and destruction of his horcruxes that Dumbles could then finish the job and get the glory.”

Hermione looked murderous, “When I get my hands on that old fu...”

Harry stopped her with a kiss. He pulled back and smirked, “Hermione my darling assassin, we can’t kill him – yet. Besides, I believe if it has to come to that Tom has already called first dibs.”

Tom smiled, “Hermione, I would suggest you focus on more pressing issues. Albus does not need more people trying to kill him.”

Now all four teens looked at Tom who had an evil but playful grin on his face. Luna spoke up with a voice a mother might use with a devious child, “Tom, what have you done? You’ve been a naughty boy again haven’t you?” Her face was completely passive, but the tone of her voice gave her playfulness away.

Tom put on his most innocent face – quite a feat that did not go unnoticed by the other 5 people – and said in a manner playing along with Luna’s, “Well, I just didn’t want Albus to be lonely and unescorted. I kind of asked that dear witch Bellatrix to ‘play’ with him.”

Luna kept up her act, “Play with him Tom?”

“Well maybe I said kill him. But really, for Bellatrix it’s the same thing. I made sure to tell her she could not visit him at Hogwarts though. Why would I want her to damage our castle?”

Hermione surprised Harry with the evil glint in her eyes, "Oh that is sooo perfect. But how will she find him."

Severus spoke up, "With the tracking charm I put on him this morning. It's an invention of Voldemort and pretty much undetectable."

Neville finally caught on, "That means he'll be pretty distracted and it will give us a better opportunity to put together a resistance."

Tom smiled again, "My thoughts exactly. However, we must get back to the point at hand. We need to decide what to do with the Horcrux called Harry Potter."

Hermione thought for a moment, "Tom, what happens to the horcrux when you pull the soul fragment out and reintegrate it?"

"I'm not sure."

Harry spoke up, "Only one way to find out. Tom, you were planning on going through the procedure today. I think you should tick to the plan. Use one of the decks. We can then see what happens to it."

Tom nodded, "Very well, I need about 30 minutes to prepare."

/Scene Break/

Amelia Bones sat back in her chair. She had spoken with her niece for hours about the enigma that was Harry Potter. Susan told her everything she knew or had heard about.

Discounting some of the stories as outrageous (killing a Basilisk with the sword of Gryffindor - I mean really) she focused on things that Susan had direct experience with.

They spent a very long time talking about the DA from the past school year. Amelia had already heard rumours that the fifth year OWL and seventh year NEWT scores for Hogwarts were going to be well above average. She even heard that one or two students might get OWLs with distinction for their performance in the Defense practical exams.

Amelia was told about these scores every year to target her recruiting for the Auror Corps. Since the last war the quality of potential Aurors has been steadily decreasing. This year seemed to be the exception and she now knew who was responsible. When Susan mentioned she had learned and – upon request from Amelia – proceeded to cast a corporeal patronus, Amelia knew that Harry Potter had a rare gift for teaching. He would probably make a good Auror, but his gift for teaching would potentially produce even more.

She made a mental note to get in contact with Mr. Potter – or rather Lord Potter-Black – and discuss his future with him. She shook her head again – most Auror cadets could not produce anything more than a silver mist by the time they graduated.

/Scene Break/

Albus had apparated to a secluded section of Muggle London. There was one particular candy shop that made the lemon drops he was so fond of. As he walked down the alley he had apparated to he heard the telltale pops of additional apparitions behind him. He then heard the distinctive voice behind him, “Oh Headmaster – I’ve been looking for you. I want to play.”

Albus did not want to play with Bellatrix Lestrange. This was an unfortunate coincidence. Giving up on his lemon drops he apparated away instead of allowing the fight to spread to muggle streets.

He apparated to the Magical area of Glasgow where another confectionary stocked more of his favourite sweets. As he walked away from the apparition point, he heard the pops behind him again. He didn’t pay them any mind since it was a public apparition point after all.

That was, until he heard the voice. “Albus,” Bella whined, “that was rude and I expect an apology. You hurt my feelings. Don’t you want to play?”

Albus apparated away once again when he saw them ready their wands.

/Scene Break/

Tom had everything set to go he was in his bedroom at the cottage and had one of the decks of cards in front of him. For the first time in a long time Tom was scared of what lay ahead. The faith and trust his new allies as well as his thirst for revenge on those who guided him down the path allowed him to find the strength to move ahead.

He had sent the teens back to the manor. If he were correct in his suspicions this procedure would be quite painful and very loud. Severus volunteered to stay behind and monitor his health.

Tom sat in his bed and drank the potion. He then muttered the incantation and drew the soul fragment out of the deck. Once free of the deck of cards the silvery vapour accelerated and slammed into Tom's forehead and he fell straight back onto his bed.

Severus heard the commotion and came into the room. Tom appeared catatonic. His body was still and stiff and his lifeless, unfocussed eyes stared at the ceiling. As Severus approached the bed Tom's mouth opened and a guttural heart-rending scream began and did not stop for another four hours.

What Severus did not know is that at the same time a similar scream was being heard in the Manor house.

/Scene Break/

Tonks looked up from the papers in the estate agents office. Remus was smiling at her. "Well what do you think?"

She was looking at a picture of the 200-year-old cottage in the Lake District near Kendall. It looked perfect. She smiled back at him and nodded.

The estate agent smiled at the happy couple. She had been looking for someone who could appreciate this property. Most people looked for more urban or suburban properties, as there were few Wizard farmers. But really with apparition, floo and portkeys you didn't need to be close to everything all the time. "Well," she said smiling at them,

“Do you want to go for a visit? I have a portkey right here if you want to visit.” She held out her clipboard.

Moony and Tonks touched it and disappeared from the office.

/Scene Break/

Tom opened his eyes. Great. Just great. He had to pick this one to start. He remembered this situation as he found himself at Riddle Manor facing Tom Riddle (his father) and his grandparents.

His father looked at him, “You’re back. We’ve been stuck here ever since you killed us.”

“Stuck where?”

“Right here where you left us. We don’t even know where here is. All we know is that we are dead and you are responsible.”

Tom tried to say something but his father interrupted him, “I mean if my life was not bad enough. I mean my wife drugged and manipulated me into loving and marrying her.” He looked at Tom, “do you know what it’s like to be manipulated for years and one day find out that your life was a lie? That it was bent to someone else’s will? That everything in your life was a lie? My wife stole me from my parents and rest of my family when she drugged me.”

Tom realized his Father’s situation was very much like his own. A strange pain started to grow in his stomach.

His father continued, “Once I cast her out and got my life back together I found out she had a child. I looked for him for years and had just found a strong lead from an orphanage in London. My son had my name and they gave me his last known address.” Tears were running down both their faces, “Then just as I’m finally closing in on him, you show up and kill us without an explanation. Well you are here now and you are not going anywhere until you tell me why!”

Tom looked at his father, “I’m your son.” He then proceeded to tell them about his life and how Dumbledore manipulated his life. He kept

his eyes down as he gave them the summary of who he was and what he became. He finally looked up with a tear-stained face, "I thought you didn't want me. I wanted to punish you for what happened to my mother Merope and erase where I had come from. I didn't see it from your point of view and after all those years in the orphanage I never thought you might actually want me."

His father and grandparents took all of this in and at the end they had tears as well. His father spoke up, "Tom, I am so sorry I never found you until it was too late. I want you to know that as soon as I found out I tried to find you. I even managed to contact a wizard since your mother was a witch. I was finally put in touch with a wizard who was a teacher. Mr. Dumblesomething. He was very nice but said that he could not help me. It would have been at the time you were eleven or twelve. I never stopped looking for my son."

Tom collapsed. He could have had a father and a family. His father loved him even after his mother's manipulations. He could have had a home to go to during school breaks. Dumbledore forced him to go back to the orphanage even though he knew Tom's father was looking for him.

He looked at his father and grandparents seeing what life he could have had. The pain inside him had been growing the whole time. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

Then the pain hit with the force of a threatened Horntail. The scene disappeared and all Tom saw was explosions of light and colour, as the pain seemed to be tearing him apart at the cellular level. This was worse than the Cruciatus curse. The curse came from the outside. This pain was from within. It felt like his body was trying to destroy itself one nerve ending at a time. As bad as the physical pain was, the mental anguish was worse. He could have had a home, a family, a father and grandparents who loved him unconditionally just because he was Tom Riddle.

But Voldemort had found them and killed them without remorse – without a thought. Tom felt the loss and remorse now. It was like an attacker going after his mind and sense of self. His long repressed anxieties were running free and unsuppressed.

He could not stop screaming as he experienced true remorse for the first time in his life.

/Scene Break/

Albus Dumbledore sat at his desk. He reflected on his very strange day. All afternoon Bellatrix and other Death Eaters had shown up either taunting him or just simply throwing curses at him. For Merlin's sake she had even cornered him in the men's room at the Leaky cauldron. He had turned around quickly and when she looked down she had just started laughing and calling him peewee.

The only place he had any rest today was when he returned to Hogwarts. He checked his clothing and person with all the revealing spells and charms he knew and could not find a tracking charm on him. So how was she able to know where he was? There must be someone spying on him. But who was it?

He headed down to the Great Hall for dinner and to prepare for the Order meeting at seven. He had to have his faculties as they discussed the new Potter problem.

/Scene Break/

Arthur Weasley had decided not to return to the Burrow. He sent an owl to Molly explaining that he was going to stay a few nights with the twins and Percy to catch up with his boys and reconnect with them. He had done this before with both Bill and Charlie after they had moved out.

In reality he was not sure if he ever wanted to face Molly again. The revelations of the Conspiracy and Molly's involvement and his two youngest children left him with a feeling of disgust. In the middle of it all was the man he had thought was above all suspicion and could be trusted more than any other – Albus Dumbledore.

Arthur also made a scary discovery. As every day passed and he stayed away from the Burrow his connection with Molly was weakening. He had never heard of this happening, however Molly

was very good with potions. He would have to get himself checked at St. Mungo's.

/Scene Break/

Albus looked out over the Great Hall at the assembled Order of the Phoenix. Much like the Death Eaters many of the pureblood members were part of the plan for the New Order. The rest were here for appearances and were expendable for what he euphemistically called the 'Greater Good'.

As he waited for everyone to assemble and find their seat he thought back to his day and being followed everywhere by Bellatrix. He had tried to floo-call Lucius but there was no answer at Malfoy Manor. He needed inside information on why Bella seemed to be everywhere he was.

He looked out over the Great hall again and noticed everyone was finally gathered at the Gryffindor table. He walked down from the head table and sat down at the head of the House table.

"Welcome everyone," he looked around and saw he had everyone's attention, "I apologize for the short notice and moving the meeting up a day but there are a few items which require our attention tonight. The first item is Harry Potter."

"As you may all now know, Harry is no longer living at his relative's house in Little Whinging. He is undoubtedly living in one of his ancestral homes."

Moody spoke up, "How can he Albus? He's not seventeen. He can't claim his inheritance."

"Ah, that Alastor is the crux of the matter. Apparently the Goblins managed to get Harry to Gringotts for Sirius Black's will to be read. Sirius had arranged for the blood adoption of Harry Potter."

Gasps went up around the table as the realization of what this meant hit everyone who was not at Gringotts on Sunday. Albus then went on to explain the Black inheritance, emancipation and Potter inheritance.

He finished with, "In short, the student who left here a few weeks ago as Mr. Potter is now Lord Potter-Black."

There was more silence around the table as everyone processed this information. Remus and Tonks were finding it hard to keep a straight face and Molly was making no attempt to hide her disgust.

Albus waited for everyone to settle down before continuing, "I met with Lord Potter-Black at Grimmauld Place earlier today. He has had it renovated and redecorated. I'm pretty sure the Goblins were involved somehow. Harry has offered to allow us to continue to use Grimmauld Place as headquarters with two conditions."

Alastor asked, "Well cough it up Albus what are the conditions?"

"The first is that Harry be allowed to attend all Order meetings. He does not want to take an active part in the Order, however he wants to know what is going on in this conflict."

Molly jumped up red in the face, "ABSOLUTELY NOT! That little brat is too young and we can't trust him to keep the information secret. He's sure to share it with his friends, especially Granger!"

"His second condition is that Miss Granger be allowed the same courtesy."

Molly looked apoplectic. She was so angry she was incapable of coherent speech.

Remus looked at Albus and made him heard above the din, "I think you should agree." Everyone looked at him as if he had grown a second head. Well, everyone except Tonks. Her glance kept shifting from Remus to the Slytherin table and he knew exactly what she was thinking. He forced his concentration back to the meeting. "Think about it. We can't keep meeting here – the board of governors could kick us out and censure you Albus for using school facilities. Grimmauld is already set up as our headquarters. If there is information you don't want Harry to hear, just don't bring it up in the meetings. You need to regain Harry's trust to get him back under control, letting Hermione in will help rebuild that more quickly. Face it,

he would only tell her anyway. If this is handled right Albus, it could be your quickest way back to having Harry in your camp. Besides, Molly's only upset since Lord Black – or was it Lord Potter – no, Lord Potter-Black cancelled the marriage contract.”

Molly nearly dove across the table at the werewolf before Hestia and Emmeline grabbed her from either side and forced her back into her chair.

“Molly!” Albus snapped, “If you can't control your behaviour I will have to control it for you. Do I make myself clear?”

Molly nodded once – not trusting herself to speak.

Albus got the twinkle back in his eye. “Thank you Molly. Remus, you do make some very good points and I find your approach intriguing – it is very much along the same lines I was considering.

“Yeah right, you were considering it after I mentioned it,” thought Remus as he said gratefully, “Thank you Albus.”

“Let's take a vote then shall we? All in favour?” Albus noted about three quarters of the hands were raised, “All opposed?” He looked around, “Very well. Harry Potter and Hermione Granger will be allowed to attend Order of the Phoenix meeting when we move back into our old headquarters.”

“Very good.” Albus clasped his hands together and stood up in a manner that if a Muggle had been present he or she would have easily mistaken him as a preacher who was about to lead his congregation in song. He started speaking again, “The second order of business is Bellatrix Lestrange. Everywhere I went once I left the castle today Bellatrix arrived no more than a minute or two after I did.”

Minerva looked shocked, “Albus how did she know where you were? Did someone else know your schedule?”

“That is the strangest part. I had no set schedule today I would think destinations up when I saw Bellatrix and her squad and each time they showed up at the new location within a minute or two. “

“Tracking spell!” exclaimed Moody.

“I checked myself over after I returned to the castle and they did not follow. Alastor, I would appreciate if you could do me the favour of checking following the meeting.”

Moody nodded, “Yes, of course.” Dumbledore knew his old friend was already using his magic eye to look for tracking spells on Albus.

The meeting went on for another half hour as miscellaneous items were taken care of. Albus dismissed the group and promised to inform them of the date of the next meeting that would be back at Headquarters.

Once everyone left except for him and Albus, Moody came up to him and ran a few scans for tracking charms. “I don’t understand it Albus, I can’t find any tracking spells but that is the only thing which makes sense of what you told us happened today.”

“I have to agree Alastor, but I can’t allow myself to be forced to stay here at Hogwarts. I’m far too visible to drop out of the public eye. I can’t be seen to have bodyguards either.”

“I could disillusion myself and follow you. Perhaps the spells or whatever they are only act outside of the Hogwarts wards? They may not even be detectable unless they are active.”

“Very well Alastor. Let us try that. Can you return tomorrow at nine am? You are more than welcome to breakfast with us and then accompany me to my appointments tomorrow.”

“Thank you for the invitation Albus. I will see you tomorrow.”

/Scene Break/

He woke up suddenly. The first thing he noticed was his body was sore all over. The horcrux reintegration was one of the worst things he had ever experienced – and it wasn’t even him. Harry had been forced to endure the entire episode through his connection with Tom.

For a brief moment he was disoriented and did not know where he was. He allowed his head and neck some movement. Even though this caused sore and tired muscles to complain very loudly he was able to determine he had somehow made it to bed. A glance at the window told him it was already night.

He sighed and murmured to himself, "I wonder how long I was out." He winced. God that hurt, his throat felt raw. Just what happened?

There was movement beside him and a familiar voice said, "Harry? Are you awake?"

What was Hermione doing in his bed? Harry's thoughts were racing. Ignoring his protesting throat Harry whispered, "My throat is very sore. Do you have anything?"

Hermione lit some candles and looked at her boyfriend. She summoned Jeeves and asked him if there was something appropriate in the Manor for Harry's throat. Jeeves returned a moment later with a potion. Harry swallowed it and even as it went down it began to restore his voice. Hermione thanked Jeeves and the elf disappeared again.

Now that his voice was back, Harry asked the first thing on his mind, "Hermione, why are you in bed with me?"

"I was so scared Harry. When you collapsed and started screaming and wailing I didn't know what to do. We could not calm you or get you to wake up. It went on for four hours. After you stopped, you were still unconscious and your whole body had spasms running up and down it. I wasn't going to leave you like that. I had Jeeves transport us here and we put you to bed and then I stayed with you to make sure you were all right. Do you want me to leave?"

"No, of course not. I feel calm with you here. I'm just worried about what your father is going to do to me."

"Let me and my Mum handle Daddy. I kind of like it here with you. How are you feeling? You were screaming for 4 hours straight."

"I'm pretty sore, but the potion you got for Jeeves is helping with that as well. Hermione, it was horrible. The pain of reintegrating a Horcrux makes the Cruciatus curse feel like a tickle charm – and that's with me feeling it second-hand. Just thinking about it brings back the memory of the pain. I don't want to remember this right now, maybe tomorrow. I need to feel better first."

Hermione ran her hand through his hair and leaned over and kissed him. This was a slow sensual kiss that left both teenagers gasping for breath once it was over. They practiced that several more times before settling down to sleep.

As she extinguished the candles, Hermione settled her head on Harry's shoulder with one arm over him and he slipped his arm around her. She had one more thing to say to Harry.

"Harry?"

"Yes 'Mione?"

"What do you think happened to the Horcrux?"

"No idea. We'll go visit Tom in the morning."

/Scene Break/

Tom Riddle sat up straight in bed as if he was awoken from a coma by an ice-cold bucket of water. His muscles protested as he looked around the room. He was thankful when he saw Severus had placed a few potions close to his bed. He took all of them and immediately started to feel better.

Taking better stock of his surroundings he looked over where the deck of cards had been.

There was nothing left but ash.

"Crap." Tom whispered to himself.

A/N – I went through several revisions and ideas on what I would write about the reintegration of a soul fragment from a Horcrux. I've never seen any stories that featured this. I went into it knowing that it had to include remorse, the person (in this case Tom) had to suffer not only physical but emotional pain, and that each death used to create a Horcrux had some meaning to Tom. I must have gone through at least a half dozen ideas and drafts that just didn't seem right. To me this one did. Let me know what you think and also if any other author has touched on this before.

I have a little confession to make. I know that quite a few of you who have left reviews said that you were concerned when Arthur was at the Ministry during the attack. Well, my original idea was to have the chapter end as Arthur was struck by a curse but I just didn't want to do that to him and changed the plot accordingly. In the end I'm glad I made the change and brought the true Weasleys on board.

I had a number of people point out to me that Geneva is in the French part of Switzerland and so the street should really have a French name. I choose to disagree. The Wizarding population of Europe is a fairly conservative lot and Switzerland is no exception. Most of the influential Wizards and Witches in Switzerland are descended from the old families in Germany and for centuries the official language of Switzerland's wizards is German.

Many of you are still asking about Charley. Well, there is no reason for him to be in England at the moment. Rest-assured, if that changes you will be the first to read about it.

For those of you reading my other story as well, I've got Chapter 4 well under way and hope to post it soon too.

Chapter 23 – I Can't Believe The News Today

Tuesday morning found Cornelius Fudge in his office early in the morning as usual. He had his morning cup of coffee and sat down to read the morning Prophet as he usually did. He took a sip of the fresh coffee picked up that paper and nearly choked as he read the small story on the first page. He painfully blew his nose to get the remainder of the coffee out of it and read the article again.

"Not good," he thought, "how in Merlin's name find out about that."

Trying to calm himself, he went over to the floo. Throwing a pinch of powder in, he stuck his head into the fire and said, "Albus, are you there?"

Albus Dumbledore looked in surprise to see Cornelius floo calling him at this time of the morning. "Cornelius, to what do I owe this call?"

"I need to speak to you. Can I please come through?"

Albus agreed and seconds later Fudge was in his office. Albus noticed the fresh coffee stains on the Minister's shirt and said, "Now what seems to be the matter?"

He handed Albus the paper, "Look at this! But I warn you – you don't want to have a mouthful of coffee when you read it."

Albus looked down at the story and muttered "Oh dear."

/Scene Break/

At the same time, Molly was up making breakfast for Ron and Ginny and herself. She heard a tapping at the window and let the paper-owl in. She took the copy of the Prophet and paid the owl. The owl flew off and she thought she would relax for a bit and enjoy her coffee and the paper.

Moments later she was scourgefying her apron as she had just repeated Cornelius' feat of high-pressure nasal ejection of a hot caffeinated beverage.

/Scene Break/

Lucius Malfoy woke up Tuesday morning hoping that it would be better than Monday. In the past 48 hours, his son and heir was turned into a squib by his own stupidity, he lost potential control of the Black Family fortune because said son was usurped by his nemesis as the head of the Black Family, he lost a sizeable chunk of his fortune when that same nemesis dissolved his marriage and reclaimed the dowry the Black's had paid for her. So in effect, he was sitting in his mansion almost knutless with no heir, no wife and he was a wanted fugitive from the Ministry.

The Dark Lord had humiliated him when he commanded him to continue to support and house the squib since he would not be able to keep Draco a secret forever. He also had to plan the takeover of the Ministry. He definitely needed Albus' help on this one. A full-scale takeover of the Ministry had to be architected properly, or else too many of the population would start to side against the pureblooded Death Eaters. Maybe there was a way this could lead to the final showdown between Potter and the Dark Lord. Things may be looking up.

The morning delivery of the Prophet interrupted his musings. One of his house elves had delivered it with his morning coffee. Lucius took a sip and read the front page.

New Black Head Pops Onto Scene

By Prophet Correspondent Rita Skeeter

This reporter has learned that a new Head of House has been named for the Most Noble and Ancient Black Family. Sources revealed that the Last Will and Testament of the Lord Sirius Orion Black was read at Gringotts on Sunday. The Black Family has some of the most stringent rules in terms of Head of House succession. Normally the succession of a Head of House is a structured affair and public notices are set out to all of the media. However, we at the Daily Prophet were not informed of the Reading and a quick check confirmed that no media outlets were notified.

The Daily Prophet attempted to contact the Ministry and obtain records of the identity of the new Lord Black and those requests were summarily denied. It seems the Ministry records had been ordered sealed by none other than Minister Fudge and Chief Warlock Dumbledore. Both were unavailable for comment and no one at the Ministry would comment on why the records were sealed.

We keep our own archives of family trees and relationships and our research based on our records indicated that Draco Malfoy (Son of Lord Lucius Malfoy and Narcissa – nee Black – Malfoy) was the most likely candidate for the title of Lord Black. In fact a good friend of young Mr. Malfoy who happened to be at the Bank on Sunday saw Mrs. Malfoy and her son attend a function that this reporter believes now was the Reading of the Will. According to our source Mr. Malfoy appeared to be wearing very expensive robes and clothing to the occasion that leads us to believe he expected to be named Lord Black.

Lucius paused for a moment, “This can’t be right,” he thought, “Draco has a good friend?”

The Prophet has not found anyone willing to talk about the proceedings during the will reading or afterwards but there are rumours that Minister Fudge even made a brief appearance at Gringotts. The Daily Prophet could find no witch or wizard who could (or would) confirm the identity of Lord Black.

Not to be deterred, this reporter arranged a meeting with a Mr. Griphook who is the Gringotts Senior Account Manager in charge of the Black Family accounts. We at the Prophet understand Gringotts policy of privacy for all of their account holders and are very sensitive and respectful to the Goblins and their code of conduct. For this reason, this reporter only asked one question of the busy Mr. Griphook namely if he could shed any light on the identity of the new Lord Black.

My dear readers, if I had not heard the words myself, I would not have believed them. Mr. Griphook responded, “Miss Skeeter, our

customer records are confidential especially for a valued client like Lord Potter-Black.”

It seems that the new Lord Black other than Harry Potter the Boy-Who-Lived and from the answer I received from Mr. Griphook, Lord Potter-Black assumed the title of Lord Potter as well. As subsequent check with the Ministry confirmed that Minister Fudge and Chief Warlock Dumbledore had sealed the Potter family records as well.

This raises a number of questions that we at The Daily Prophet are trying to find answers to:

Why was the naming of a new Head for not one but Two Ancient and Noble families suppressed by the Minister and the Chief Warlock?

How was Harry Potter named Lord Black? It is true that our records indicate that he was distantly related to Lord Black but nowhere near enough to be in line for the Head of House title.

What plans does Lord Potter-Black have for his seats in the Wizengamot?

Will Lord Potter-Black be returning for his sixth year at Hogwarts in September?

And finally – ladies brace yourselves – how serious is his current relationship with long time friend the muggleborn witch Hermione Granger? This reporter witnessed them greet each other in a very affectionate manner before having lunch with another couple yesterday in Diagon Alley.

A floo call to the Malfoy residence was answered by a house-elf who stated that no one from the family was available for comment. The Daily Prophet also tried contacting Lord Potter-Black and Miss Granger and neither could be reached.

We will bring you more news on this story as our intrepid reporters uncover it.

Related Articles:

Harry Potter – The School Years – Page 3

Harry Potter – Known Relationships – Page 5

Albus Dumbledore – History of Secrecy – Page 2

Minister Fudge – Vendetta against Lord Potter-Black? – Page 2

/Scene Break/

All over England wizards and witches were waking up to this story. It became the talk over breakfast and around the coffee stations at magical workplaces across the country.

Reactions were mixed. A certain faction of purebloods were appalled that the Head of two Ancient and Noble families was ‘associating’ with a Mudblood. Certain more open-minded parents were contemplating sending Lord Potter-Black marriage contracts offering their daughters – some even considering suggesting Lord Potter-Black take two wives. Most current Gryffindor students were laughing about Draco Malfoy being denied his birthright. Slytherin’s were wondering just how much being a Lord would go to Potter’s head. A certain red-haired brother and sister from Gryffindor took the news considerably well and with an unusually calm demeanor – it may have had something to do with the fact that their mother had mixed a high-potency calming draft into their first glasses of pumpkin juice.

In fact, very few people did not have a reaction one way or another. Most of the Order Eaters had stopped reading The Daily Prophet a long time ago and those who still did saw the story as old news.

The person at the centre of the story was just waking up from a well-deserved sleep after a long, painful Monday. He noticed that his girlfriend who was also part of said story had stayed at his side all night. He determined it was a most pleasant way to wake up in the morning.

/Scene Break/

Jeeves finally woke Harry and Hermione at half past eight. They had agreed to meet Tom and Severus for breakfast in the main kitchen at nine. After a few short, passionate kisses, Hermione left for her room to get ready and Harry had a quick shower. The potions Jeeves had provided last night helped, but he was still quite sore.

They walked into the kitchen hand in hand right on time to find Severus, Tom, Luna, Neville and Narcissa waiting for them.

Harry looked at Tom with sympathy and said, "I went through hell yesterday and I was just an observer. You must feel close to death."

Tom looked pensive for a moment and said, "While I do feel physically like I allowed a mountain troll to use me for clubbing practice, mentally and emotionally I feel strangely better."

Narcissa nodded in understanding, "It's hard to place it, but you look different. I can't quite put my finger on it, but you look more human – no offense mind you."

"None taken. I feel different too."

Hermione asked the question that had been burning in her mind all night, "What happened to the Horcrux?"

Tom looked around and said, "The soul fragment was successfully reintegrated. I think that's why I feel and look better. Unfortunately, the deck of cards was destroyed."

Hermione's expression remained impassive, but Harry knew how much pain she was feeling – or rather he was feeling from her. As soon as Tom gave the answer to her question her hand, which had been lovingly entwined with Harry's underneath the table constricted and Harry was wondering just how soon the bones in his hands would start popping.

"So," Hermione said in an emotionless voice, "we are back to the beginning."

"It would seem so," Tom said, "perhaps you and I should spend some more time researching this."

Luna piped up, "I would like to help as well. Maybe Harry can get rid of the Nargle infestation at the same time." She said this with 'Loony' at full intensity causing those around the table to wonder exactly what she had volunteered to do.

Hermione remained unfazed, "OK, the three of us will be start our research right after breakfast. May I suggest Tom that you let your soul heal itself for a few days before you try to integrate the next one?"

"Yes, I think that would be wise. It looks like Harry had a lot of the pain but none of the gain last night."

Harry looked around, "Can I help with the research?"

Hermione shook her head; "I completely forgot to mention to you that Tonks needs to talk to you about Madame Bones. She also said that Madame Bones contacted her yesterday since she tried to reach you and her owl returned with the message undelivered. I asked Hedwig to fly to the Ministry with a note for Madame Bones explaining that you are in a secure location that no owls can find. She sent Hedwig back with her note. You have an appointment with her this afternoon."

At that moment Hedwig flew into the kitchen and landed in front of Harry. She stared at him.

"Hello girl. How are you?" He went to pet her and she nipped him. When he pulled his hand away she continued to stare at him.

"I've been ignoring you haven't I?"

To everyone's surprise it looked like Hedwig nodded.

"I'm sorry girl. Let me finish breakfast and contact Tonks. Then we can spend the rest of the morning together. How does that sound?"

Hedwig seemed to think about it for a second and then hopped on to Harry's shoulder and nuzzled him with her head. He fed her a piece of Bacon from his plate.

Narcissa looked at Harry and asked, "Harry, I've noticed that your owl seems to interact directly with you. I've never heard of an owl doing any thing remotely like that."

Harry thought for a moment and shrugged, "I'm not sure. If I were to guess I would say that Hedwig was my only companion at the Dursleys and she saw a lot of bad things happen to me. I think she literally took me under her wing and decided I needed taking care of. I've stopped questioning why she does the things she does, I'm just grateful she's for lack of a better term 'adopted' me."

Everyone around the table laughed. Harry held up his hands in surrender, "Hey, I'm not kidding. We are the best of friends but I know enough not to piss Hedwig off."

That elicited more laughter and helped lift the heavy mood from around the table. The rest of breakfast was light conversation. Harry, Tom and Severus found out the Order Eaters meeting was rescheduled for that evening since Harry and Tom were 'indisposed'. Tom agreed to share the memory of his horcrux integration with the whole group. Hedwig ate some more bacon and flew off after Harry promised again that he would spend the morning with her outside.

Shortly before breakfast broke up Tonks and Remus arrived. Tonks tossed that morning's copy of the Prophet on the table as the elves prepared another to places at the table for breakfast. Narcissa was the first to pick it up.

"Well Lord Potter-Black and Miss Granger, the cat is out of the bag. You are officially an 'item'." Narcissa said in a very playful demeanour.

"What?" Hermione and Harry said in unison and both tried to snatch the paper away from her but Narcissa was too fast.

Narcissa started reading in an entertainment reporter's nasally voice, "And finally – ladies brace yourselves – how serious is his current

relationship with long time friend the muggleborn witch Hermione Granger? This reporter witnessed them greet each other in a very affectionate manner before having lunch with another couple yesterday in Diagon Alley. Oh Harry, they even have a follow-up story on your previous romantic relationships.” She was having way too much fun with this. Especially when Harry and Hermione both started to blush. Even Severus and Tom were laughing at the couple’s reaction.

Finally Harry held Hermione’s hand and said, “I’m glad everyone knows. Now all those guys out there who thought they might have a chance with you know you are with me now.”

Tonks looked at her and said, “But you know Hermione, you are going to be the target of hatred for almost all of the unmarried – and even some of the married – witches between the ages of 13 and 35.”

“35!” Harry yelled, “I’m a few weeks shy of 16, that’s just sick.”

Tonks teased further, “Deal with it lover boy. That Quidditch physique and those eyes are to die for. 15 or 50, there are witches out there who would kill for a chance to ride your broomstick.”

Harry went beet red and the double entendre. Hermione if possible was even redder. Tonks just looked and said “Gotcha!”

Harry bowed in deference to Tonks, “You’ve won this round.”

Narcissa applauded and got up and hugged her niece, “You are so much Andy’s daughter.”

Tom and Severus looked like they were going to be sick and just excused themselves to go start the research. Hermione and Luna excused themselves and went to join them. However as Hermione left to head to the guesthouses, Luna headed for the library in the Manor.

“Luna, we have all the books on horcruxes in the guesthouse.”

“Ah, but those aren’t they books I’m researching silly. They don’t have the information to get rid of the right Nargles. You would know that if you’ve been studying them as long as I have.” She then hummed to herself and skipped to the library.

Hermione just shook her head and left to follow Tom and Severus.

/Scene Break/

Albus sat down at his desk after Cornelius had left. The news of Lord Potter-Black had been revealed sooner than he had hoped. He and Fudge needed to do some damage control. Hopefully the explanation that Fudge and him has put together would explain their reasoning enough that the wizarding population would accept it.

It was almost 9:00 and he was expecting Alastor for breakfast. As he left to make his way down to the Great Hall he heard another voice coming from his Floo. “Albus, it’s Lucius. We need to talk.”

Dumbledore considered things for a moment and then invited Lucius through. He quickly scribbled a note on some parchment and asked Fawkes to deliver it to Minerva. It explained he would be late for breakfast and asked that she entertain Alastor until he got to the Great Hall.

He turned to the man standing by the fireplace, “Lucius, please have a seat. We have much to discuss.”

“Damn right we do Albus,” Lucius snarled as he sat down. “My life is on the verge of ruin.”

Albus assumed the grandfather image complete with the twinkle in his eye, “Ruin Lucius? Surely you are exaggerating.”

“Cut the twinkle crap Albus. I’m talking about the end of the Malfoy line.”

The twinkle abruptly disappeared. The end of a pureblood line was one thing Albus took very seriously. “How can that be Lucius? Is

there something wrong with Draco?" Albus was not going to let Lucius know what he heard from Severus – at least not yet.

"Draco has no more magic. He's a squib Albus. According to the succession rights of the Malfoy family, he can't become head of the house anymore."

Albus was shocked – a pureblood heir losing his magic? It was relatively unheard of. "Lucius, has this to do with the promise he made to Tom?"

"How did you ... oh, never mind. Yes, this does have to do with that. Apparently my son swore on his magic that he would pledge the allegiance of the Black Family to the Dark Lord after the reading of the will. When he didn't become Lord Black, Tom called in the oath humiliating me in the process."

"Humiliating you?"

"Yes, he made me swear to support Draco and not cast him out of the house and disown him like the filthy squib he is."

Albus thought quickly, "Lucius, I know how we can explain this and make you come out looking good."

"How Albus?"

"Draco will continue in his NEWT studies at Hogwarts. You will explain that he contracted a rare disease over the summer that sapped his magical core. We'll say that you sent him to a private clinic in China that specializes in this malady and they are not sure when or if he will ever recover. In the meantime, Hogwarts will not turn it's back on a student and will allow him to continue to take NEWT courses in Potions, Astronomy, Care of Magical Creatures and the theory parts of Ancient Runes and Arithmancy. He will also be allowed to continue on the Slytherin Quidditch team if he so desires. While there is still 'hope' he may recover, we do not have to let anyone know he is no longer your heir."

Lucius smiled for the first time in a couple of days, "Thank you Albus, that will give me time."

"In the meantime, you and Narcissa have to come up with a new heir if you know what I mean."

"Um, that's my next problem. Lord Black dissolved our marriage and reclaimed her dowry. My liquid assets are vastly depleted and Narcissa is now Narcissa Black."

"I had suspected that is what Sirius meant." Seeing the questioning look on Lucius' face Dumbledore continued, "Sirius stated in his will that he had only one thing to bequeath to Narcissa however she would have to speak to the new Lord Black in private. This was one of the possible things that would have warranted such a request."

"I need your help to find a new wife. The Malfoy family cannot be without an heir."

"I will make enquiries around to families who have older, unmarried daughters. I could also inquire about magical orphans. Mr. Potter became Lord Black because of a blood adoption. You could consider that."

"No. One of the earliest Malfoys considered it 'bad faith' to create an heir in that way and any type of adoption for the purpose of creating an heir was banned in the family charter. Even Scorpius managed to produce a suitable magical male human heir."

Albus held back a snicker at the mention of Scorpius and maintained his serious face. "Very well, we will have to see who you can marry. However, the available pool of people I can talk to is small right now since you are a fugitive."

"I know! I'm not sure what Bella was thinking when she broke us out, but now I have to provide a plan to the Dark Lord by September on how he can secretly take over the Ministry."

"Take over the Ministry? I did not think he would try to act that quickly. I thought he would try to further destabilize our society. You and your

advisors were supposed to convince him that attacking more muggle and muggleborn targets would spread fear and panic.”

“Well obviously he’s not listening. There are two major assignments he left us with before he took off to Merlin knows where with Snape. I got the assignment to draft the plans to take over the Ministry quietly.”

“And the other assignment?”

“Well initially Draco had this assignment, but being a squib kind of meant he could not complete it. So I got Bella’s assignment and Bella got Draco’s.”

“What is Bella’s assignment?”

“To kill you.”

Albus paled and sat back in his chair heavily. “That explains much.”

“What do you mean?”

Albus described the events of yesterday, “everywhere I went Bella showed up with her team. How is she tracking me?”

“I don’t know. Tom didn’t let me in on it.”

“I need you to find out for me. Talk to Bella and see what she knows. The only place she isn’t bothering me is Hogwarts. That may be the key. I need to be able to move around without me finding her at every turn.”

“I’ll see if I can talk to Bella today. Although,” Lucius allowed himself a smirk, “I’ll only be able to find her if you are at Hogwarts.”

Albus ignored the last comment and moved on, “I want you to continue your plans for taking over the Ministry. I can review it as your complete draft proposals and provide some advice on strategy and method. We can use this to our advantage to force the confrontation between Tom and the boy. As for your being a fugitive, let me work something out with Cornelius.”

Lucius got up and went to the fireplace. He turned and faced the Headmaster, "Thank you for your time today Albus. As always, I appreciate your assistance and wisdom. I will try to find out what I can to help solve your little problem with Bella."

Albus nodded to him and made his way down to the Great Hall as Lucius disappeared into the flames.

/Scene Break/

Harry looked over at Tonks, "So Tonks, Hermione mentioned that you needed to talk to me about Madame Bones."

"Yes Harry, she called me in to meet with her yesterday. We had an interesting conversation. She wanted to know about the battle at the DoM and why I was there. I told her as much as I could about the Order of the Phoenix without breaking my oaths." She went on for the next 10 minutes to discuss her discussion with Amelia.

"So why does she want to see me?"

"I think she is trying to find out as much as she can about Fudge and Dumbledore. Dumbledore blocked her access to you so she could not ask questions about the battle at the DoM and the circumstances leading up to it. However, now that you are Lord Potter-Black, Dumbledore can't block access to you and it's your decision to meet with her. Harry, I think you should. Cover what she wants to cover and then tell her about the conspiracy when the opportunity arises. You can trust her. I told her a number of things that would get me thrown into Azkaban or even killed, but she let me go and even allowed me to come up with the cover story."

Harry thought for a moment and then nodded in agreement. "OK, I'll send a note with Hedwig that I'll meet with her at 2."

As if on queue, Hedwig came flying back in. Narcissa stifled a giggle – he hadn't even called her.

Harry scribbled a note and looked at his familiar, "Hedwig, can you deliver this to Amelia Bones right away please?"

She just looked at him.

"I know I promised to spend the morning with you. The sooner you get back the sooner we can play."

She stared at him some more. More giggles erupted around the table.

"How about I spend tomorrow morning with you as well?"

She hooted and nodded once and extended her leg. "Thanks girl!" he said as she flew off.

Narcissa said, "Poor Hermione, she doesn't stand a chance. Hedwig already has you whipped."

"Tonks? Can you come with me to the meeting?"

"Sorry Harry I can't. Remus and I have big plans today."

Harry noticed Remus was pale, "What's up?"

"We are spending the entire day buying him a new wardrobe."

Harry looked at Remus, "Clothing shopping with your girlfriend Moony? That's one of the nine circles of hell."

Tonks stuck her tongue out at Harry and led Remus away. They were gone with a soft 'pop'.

Narcissa excused herself and left the room as well. Neville who had remained silent and enjoyed the show was about to leave when Harry stopped him.

"Nev, can you come with me this afternoon?"

"Me?"

“Yeah, you were there at the DoM. You were in the DA and know what Umbridge was like. You’re also part of our new group. I’d like you there with me.”

“OK Harry.”

“Great. I’ll meet you in the Lobby of the Ministry at quarter to two.”

/Scene Break/

Narcissa was sitting outside on a bench near the stream that passed through the estate. She had a parchment in her hand and was writing furiously. Every once in a while she would stop and absentmindedly chew on her sugar quill. She would then scratch something out and write different words instead.

This was the first in a series of little ‘projects’ Andy and her had thought up to get back at Lucius for the hell he put her through. She giggled to herself and thought, “Merlin, what’s come over me? Ever since Harry annulled my marriage and I got reunited with Andy I’ve felt so light and free. I haven’t giggled so much in years.”

The note was finally finished. She’d talk to Harry about it this evening. In order for this to work, the note would have to come from Lord Black.

As she sat back to enjoy the perfect summer morning she thought that Andy and her should talk to the Weasley twins. Their reputation for revenge preceded them and they just might be able to help with some of these little ‘projects.’

/Scene Break/

Bella had her team assembled and on alert for Dumbledore’s first movement of the day. As she waited having breakfast, she silently thanked her Dark Lord for this assignment. It played to her strengths. Besides it gave her a chance to deal with her repressed issues with the Headmaster from her school days.

Her team was fairly relaxed as well. All recruits, she had chosen them because of their hatred of the man. She couldn’t have anyone on her

team who actually respected Dumbledore – they might try to save him in the heat of the moment.

Bella wasn't actually ready to kill him yet. Yes, most people may consider her crazy, but if there is one thing she had learned from her Dark Lord it was the power of terror. Make the victim feel completely powerless before you take their life. Yes, she intended to 'play' with Albus first. He had to know that wherever and whenever he went out she would be there taunting him, threatening him. Only once his paranoia took hold would she actually start battling him and trying to fulfill her mission.

She was startled from her juicy plans by the appearance of Lucius coming towards her.

"Lucy!" she yelled noticing him visibly wincing, "How sweet you came to see me. I may not be able to stay very long, Albus may decide to leave and I want to welcome him wherever he goes."

"Really Bella? Do you have his schedule?"

"Oh, Lucy, I don't need a schedule. Any time he leaves the castle I just know where he is. I have no idea how but I suspect our Lord gave me the ability to read his mind enough to know where he is."

"Well why haven't you finished your mission yet?"

"Lucy, the Dark Lord said to kill him – not when. I'm taking my time and enjoying this assignment. I'll kill him when the time is right."

She looked at him with a playfully evil grin on her face, "And how is that squib son of yours today? Has he been to visit his friends yet?" She laughed at him, "Lucy, Lucy, Lucy, you are out of favour with the Dark Lord. I hope your plan for the Ministry meets with his approval. I can't imagine what else he might do to your family."

Lucius didn't say another word – he was not going to provide Bellatrix with any more ammunition. Suddenly she had a look of recognition and said to her team, "Let's go!" and they disappeared leaving a bewildered Lucius behind wondering just how she was tracking Albus.

/Scene Break/

Nymphadora was having the time of her life. She knew this was slow torture for Remus shopping for clothes, trying on different outfits for her to see. However it had to be done. She was tired of seeing her new boyfriend in run down clothes and every time he came out wearing something new that actually fit he was a different man altogether.

She realized that they had only been together as a couple of less than a week, but they had known each other for the past two years. She had been immediately attracted to the seemingly shy and reserved man. As she got to know him she saw the intelligence underneath and his gentle nature. Whenever Remus and Sirius would tell her about the Marauders, she started to see the mischievous glint in his eyes.

The fact that he was a werewolf did not bother her at all. He was only a beast for one night a month and the rest of the time he was the Remus she knew and came to love. Besides, the wolf in him made him very interesting.

Remus came out of the change room to model the latest outfit Tonks had wanted him to try. He looked at her and noticed that her hair had gotten a bit darker pink than when he went in and she was blushing. Remus knew that look very well and smiled knowing that he was one lucky man. Looking into the mirror he saw himself in a muggle suit and tie. The cut of the suit fit him well and he was surprised at how it made him feel. He was no longer the werewolf just trying to get by, he saw a handsome, and confident man looking back at him. Maybe buying clothing wasn't so bad at all.

He looked over at Nymphadora with love. He had known her for close to two years and there had been an attraction between them from the start. He had tried to keep his distance because of the age gap, but when she came to him last week and started flirting, he could not help but reciprocate. That led to them both discovering the other had the same feelings. Now they had found a cottage to share and would be

moving in by next week. He planned to ask Bill to help erect the wards around it.

Remus felt more alive than he had for a long time. He got a glint in his eye and decided it was his turn to try something. He looked at Tonks and winked. She got up and hugged him and told him how sexy his current outfit looked. He whispered in her ear, "I need help changing. I've already placed the silencing and notice-me-not charms."

Nymphadora's hair changed colour to match the blush that little bit of news created.

/Scene Break/

Hermione, Tom and Severus had spent the morning going over all of the books from the Black library that even mentioned Horcruxes in passing. There was absolutely no mention of people being used as Horcruxes or even any clue on how to remove a Horcrux without damaging the 'vessel'. Hermione was beyond frustrated but did not give up hope.

They agreed to go back through the entire Black library if they had to. Failure was not an option to anyone here. Tom needed to reintegrate as many soul fragments as possible since one had already been lost with the destruction of the diary. Losing Harry was not even in the realm of possibility as Tom and Severus were constantly reminded.

/Scene Break/

Lucius arrived home and summoned his 'son'.

Draco arrived with the same downtrodden look he had since he had lost his Magic. Lucius had already worked on his story since Draco was not aware of his close relationship with the Headmaster. Lucius was not yet ready to include Draco in their plans since Draco had never been able to keep his mouth shut. Lucius normally had no dealings with the Muggle world, but he once heard a quote attributed to an American Muggle President and he had tried to instill it in Draco

with no tangible result. It went, 'Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt.'

"Draco, I spoke to professor Dumbledore today."

"What for? I can't go back for my NEWTs as a squib!"

"I told him that you had contracted a rare disease and that your magical core was severely weakened. He thinks that you are at a special clinic in China right now but that your magic may not have regenerated enough by the time school starts."

"And this helps me how?"

"You can continue in your studies with subjects that do not require actual magic and sit for your NEWTs. It will also give you an opportunity to get close to Harry Potter. You just have to stay out of sight for the summer."

"Why are you doing this?"

"I want you to exact our revenge on Lord Potter-Black. I don't want our family to be any further disgraced. I want to give you a chance to redeem yourself and prove that you are still useful to me."

Draco smiled an evil smile and said, "Thank you for this opportunity father. I will not fail you."

/Scene Break/

Arthur floo-called the Ministry and took the day off work. He said that he had been feeling strange for the past few days and was going to get himself checked out.

Arriving at St. Mungo's he spoke to a healer who ordered a series of tests. Arthur specifically asked them to check for any potion contamination and run a full scan for spells and charms.

/Scene Break/

Albus and a disillusioned Moody had apparated to Diagon Alley as a test. They had walked no further than tow paces when there were multiple pops behind them. Dumbledore cringed when Bella started saying, "Oh good morning Headmaster. Did you finally come to play?"

Instead of apparating right away, Dumbledore wanted to stall Bella so Moody could scan for possible tracking spells. "Hello Bella, this is getting to be quite a habit of yours. To what do I owe your sudden interest in me?"

"Now, now Headmaster. A girl's got to have her secrets. Let's just say if I were an animagus, I think I would be a cat."

"A cat? You mean like professor McGonagall?" Albus didn't get it.

Moody on the other hand smiled. He knew what she meant. Bella might be a psychopath, but she wasn't stupid.

"Enough of this professor! Let's play!" Bella and the Death Eaters raised their wands at the headmaster and several bystanders.

Dumbledore knew that Bella wanted him, but he could not risk some of the pureblood families in the area – he apparated away. Moody still hadn't been detected. He watched as Bella paused and then said, "He's back at Hogwarts. I was so looking forward to playing today." She pouted and then addressed her team, "Back to Headquarters"

Moody headed back to the gates of Hogwarts once Bella and her team were gone. Dumbledore was waiting for him just inside the gates.

Dumbledore was impatient, "Well Alastor. You see what I had to put up with yesterday? Did you find anything?"

"I detected no spells or charms that I know of. I watched her after you left – it's almost like she's reading your mind."

"My Occlumency barriers are in place. However I will take the time today to meditate and check on them. One thing still puzzles me though."

“What’s that?”

“Based on what Lucius told me her orders are to kill me. Why doesn’t she just try to do that?”

“Because she’s a cat.”

“What does that have to do with it?”

“Albus, have you never had a pet cat?”

“No, we had dogs at my family residence and lots of goats, but no cats – mother was allergic. In my adult life I have preferred avian companions and once Fawkes joined me I had no need for a pet.”

“Well, there is one thing about cats you should know.”

“And that is?”

“They are obsessed with playing with their food. Cat’s don’t just stalk and kill their prey. They play with it in an almost sadistic way. Once they get bored, death quickly follows.”

“Oh.” Albus said and then realization hit him, “Oh my!”

/Scene Break/

The early afternoon found Luna surrounded by half-open books in the Potter library. She had been following a certain avenue of research in an attempt to solve both Harry’s and Tom’s dilemma – Tom needed the soul fragment attached to Harry and Harry needed to survive its extraction.

She had come up with a possible solution several hours ago, however her Ravenclaw secondary traits ensured that she would thoroughly research the solution before proposing it.

She sat back from the books. The magic she researched had never been used for this purpose however she had calculated an 80

percent probability that it would work. Going back to her research notes she checked them over and ensured that she had properly identified all of her research material. She would want Hermione and most likely Tom to check this over but especially Hermione.

“After all,” she said to herself, “to make this work Hermione will have to be involved and risk herself too.”

A/N – As always thank you for all your reviews. One reviewer has helped me decide what we are going to do with Harry the Horcrux, but I'll leave that secret to between just Luna and me right now.

Chapter 24 – Author's Note

Molly Weasley was just finishing up the potions she had been brewing with Ginny. Molly had brewed a number of love potions in her time and while she was not exceptionally gifted in the art of potion making, these were her specialty. This was not an ordinary Amorentia. No, she smiled as she went through the final steps; this was a Prewitt family recipe passed down from daughter to daughter. The past few days she had continued the family legacy by passing the knowledge down to her daughter.

She was just gathering the last ingredient – pure white pepper – that was one of her personal modifications to the recipe. She grabbed a handful of the pepper and brought it up close to her face to inhale the scent in order to ensure it had the proper freshness. Unfortunately for Molly an owl flew through the open window behind her and clipped the back of her head forcing her eyes, nose and mouth to come into contact with the pepper just as she was inhaling the scent. Her throat and nasal passages that were already trying to heal from the coffee incident earlier in the day were now shocked back into extreme pain as the delicate flesh and membranes were introduced to the less than gentle 'healing' effects of white pepper. The screams brought on by this exquisite pain alerted Ron and Ginny to the fact that something may have happened to their mother. They arrived in the kitchen to see Molly dunking her entire head in a bucket of water in what appeared to be a bizarre purifying ritual.

Undaunted by all of the screaming and going-on, the owl was perched on the counter beside the sink. Every time Molly raised her head out of the bucket, the owl would offer her it's leg that had a note attached to it. Correspondingly every time she immersed her head back in the bucket the owl would drop its leg back down again. Ron and Ginny watched a few repetitions of this with a certain morbid fascination. They had tried talking to their mother but could only manage a few words between dunks.

Finally after about 15 minutes, Ginny beckoned the owl and it flew over to her. Ginny took the note from the proffered leg and the owl flew back out the window finally happy to be out of the house and away from the strange woman.

Ginny saw the parchment was addressed to her mother and looked to be in her father's handwriting. She thought of opening it but waited until she got her mother's permission.

It was still another 15 minutes before Molly found that she could expose her face to the air. She still had problems breathing and speaking.

Ginny looked at her mother, "Mum? Are you OK?"

"Yes deah." Molly's speech was impaired by the lack of a properly functioning nasal cavity.

"What happened?"

"I wuz checkin the what peppah and the awl hit mah head."

Ron and Ginny grimaced as they worked out what happened.

"Wat did that awl wand?"

Ginny spoke up, "It had a note from dad."

"Author?"

"Yes."

"Weh go ahea and open id."

"OK."

Ginny cracked open the note and read it. Her jaw dropped."

Molly's eyes had recovered enough to see Ginny's face well enough.
"Whad? Whad id it? Wead me Author's note!"

/Scene Break/

3 Hours Earlier

To say Arthur Weasley was not a happy man would be akin to saying that a Norwegian Ridgeback's breath was a bit tepid. As he stepped back into the street after leaving St. Mungo's the normally calm, gentle and friendly man was a swirling mass of emotions.

In the back of his mind he knew he needed to calm down. Every time that part of his conscious mind was about to succeed, another part of his mind looking for retribution thrust it self to the forefront and jammed the results of his tests with the healers. That caused the anger and hurt to manifest itself all over again.

Arthur needed to talk to someone and he knew the right people to talk to. With a pop he was gone from St. Mungo's and appeared in Diagon Alley. After stopping at Gringotts, he walked into the Twins' shop and they could immediately see that their father was fuming.

Fred nodded to George and then went over to his father. "Dad," he said quietly with a distinct edge of concern in his voice, "what's wrong. We've never seen you like this."

Arthur composed himself as best he could, "Can you please see if you can get Bill and Fleur and Percy and Audrey here? I received some information and I need to talk to all of you as soon as possible. I have some very important news."

"Of course. I'll go get them now. You just go through to the back and George and I will close up the shop once everyone is here. We've got some Ogden's in the cupboard – you look like you could use some."

Arthur could feel himself calming down. He had sons who cared for him and that took the edge off his hurt. He went through to the back as Fred consulted with George before leaving.

As soon as Fred left, George closed the store and went through to the back after the last customer departed. He didn't want his father left alone too long.

/Scene Break/

Narcissa sat on the sofa in the sitting room at the manor with a look of utter fascination. She had watched Harry come back from his morning with Hedwig and thought it may be a good time to talk to him about the plan she had developed with Andy. She went to his room to get her notes and headed back to the sitting room to find the sight that had her on the sofa staring.

Harry was sitting in a chair reading the apparition handbook. That was normal – Harry had just become emancipated so that meant he could apply for an apparition license. Hedwig was perched on his shoulder – a normal sight as well. The thing that caught Narcissa's attention was the fact that the owl appeared to be reading along with Harry. He would finish the page he was reading and would wait until Hedwig tapped the back of his head before turning the page. Narcissa watched as the owl's eyes and head moved back and forth and down the page.

After a while Harry noticed that Narcissa was there and staring at him. He finished the chapter he was reading and addressed his familiar, "Hey girl. I've got to have lunch soon and then go to the Ministry. Let's stop here and we can read some more tomorrow morning. Why don't you head up and get some rest."

Hedwig nodded and hooted in agreement and after nipping his ear affectionately she flew out of the window and up to the owlry.

Harry turned to Narcissa and saw her expression, "What?"

She looked at him incredulously, "Was your owl just reading?"

"Yeah. She started during the summer between second and third year. At first I thought she just wanted to perch on my shoulder, but I found that if I turned the page too soon, I'd get bitten. It took me a little while to figure out she hadn't finished the page yet."

Narcissa just continued to stare at him with the same incredulous look.

Harry just continued, "Care of Magical Creatures and Herbology are her favourite. However I think she also has an interest in Potions. There have been a few times she has helped me find ingredients and alerted me to move on to the next step. She also likes to read Charms and Transfiguration but I'm not sure she gets much from them." He chuckled, "A few pages of History or Divination just puts her to sleep."

Narcissa's brain was still not functioning. She shook herself out of it. "Harry, you do know that Owls can't read. In fact all the owls I've met except Hedwig keep to themselves until you can find them to send a letter."

"Well, Hedwig is my friend. She was my only companion during those summers at the Dursleys and I took to talking to her and after a while I started to interpret her reactions enough to realize she was communicating back to me. Maybe Hedwig is not unique, but most Wizards just ignore their owls like they ignore any other magical creature."

Narcissa pondered that for a while before she remembered why she was there. "Harry, Andy and I have been planning our own revenge on my former husband and we need your help."

"My help? Sure, but I'm nowhere as good at revenge as someone who grew up in the Black Family."

"Don't sell yourself short – it's in your blood. Remember both your fathers were Marauders. The reason why we need your help with this one is that it requires Lord Black." She passed over the final version of the note to Harry to read.

He broke out into a wide grin. "I can take care of this today if you want."

She nodded.

"Very well. Miss Black would you give me the honour of accompanying me to lunch? I'm sure our "researchers" will be too engrossed in their studies to join us."

She held out her hand, "I would love to Lord Black."

They proceeded to the table and the elves brought the food out for them. Narcissa and Harry talk idly about his meeting that afternoon with Amelia and she also asked him more about Hedwig.

About halfway through their meal, Luna came down for some food as well. They noticed she was smiling and she chuckled once or twice as she looked at Harry.

Inquiring glances from the other two people did not result in any information and when Harry asked her what was so amusing, she just smiled and said in a singsong voice she had to go and find Hermione. Harry shook his head. He had a strange feeling the whatever made 'Loony Lovegood' come back out would not bode well for him – well, the appearance of 'Loony' and the fact that the girl found something very amusing every time she looked at him.

/Scene Break/

Luna arrived at the small cottage on the grounds and let herself in. The three other occupants looked up at her arrival.

Losing the 'Loony' persona she asked, "So, any luck with the books about Horcruxes?"

The three shook their heads, "No, not yet. There just hasn't been a case like this ever documented. Now that you are here you can help. Just pick up any of these books and see if there is anything we may have missed. We've each been through them."

Luna shook her head, "Why would I read them when I already had the answer."

They all looked up in surprise. Tom was the first to speak, "Where did you find the answer."

"It was an inspiration of mine. You are trying to find a counter to so-called 'dark' magic with the same types of magic. I went to the

opposite end. I found the answer in the Potter library. It's actually quite an amazing collection."

Hermione, was getting impatient, "Luna, what is it?"

"The Library? It's a room on the second floor of the manor. Quite large actually, many, many books – some so old that I suspect they may be the only copies. You get there by ..."

Hermione interrupted Luna, "Luna, I know about the library. What I meant was what is the solution for Harry's Horcrux?"

"Oh, that actually makes more sense. It's not like you to ignore a library especially one that is filled with such rare and valuable works. It's quite funny really that I would think that. But, I'm digressing again. It happens to me a lot. I try to make a point and end up going off on a tangent. Conversations are more interesting when you don't know where you will end up. In fact ..." she paused and thought she saw steam coming out of Hermione's ears – actually the elves had just delivered a steaming hot soup for lunch and one of the bowls was placed in such a way that it was obscured from Luna's vision by Hermione's head. This alignment – regardless of however coincidental it was – had the desired effect of getting Luna back to the point.

Luna took a couple of books out of her bag and put them on the table. Tom and Severus shook their head when they saw the titles and Hermione buried her face in her hands allowing Luna to see the soup and allowed her to stop worrying that Hermione's brain was overheating.

Looking at the books from between her fingers Hermione groaned, "How could we miss something that obvious?"

Luna replied, "I'm not sure I'll answer that question. Hermione?" The witch looked up at Luna, "The answer I found involves some risk and it would require a sacrifice of sorts from you. At least I assume it would be you."

"Sacrifice? What kind of sacrifice?" asked a now very wary Hermione.

/Scene Break/

After a relaxing lunch with Narcissa, Harry and Neville portkeyed to Diagon Alley to take care of his errand for Narcissa. Once they arrived at their destination Harry stopped in front of the building and looked up the steps and stared.

This was the place where much of his pain and grief in the magical world originated – or at the very least was magnified. He sighed and Neville clasped his shoulder.

“Harry, I have a feeling I know what’s going through your mind right now. Just think of it this way – it’s now your turn to use them as a tool to achieve your own ends.”

Harry turned and smiled at his friend, “Thanks Nev. You’re right, I stopped worrying about what they said about me a long time ago. Let’s get this over with.”

And with that the two friends climbed the stairs two at a time and entered the offices of the Daily Prophet.

Once inside they enquired about posting an announcement in the Society Pages. They were directed to the department on the second floor. Once there, Harry walked up to the appropriate desk where a very stuffy wizard sat surrounded by parchment.

Harry and Neville sat themselves in the empty chairs in front of the desk. The wizard looked up briefly at the two teenage boys in front of him. He wrinkled his nose in disgust and went back to his work pointedly ignoring them.

Harry was gobsmacked. He looked at Neville who was staring open-mouthed at the rudeness of this man. Harry calmed himself a bit.

“Excuse me.”

The wizard made no move to acknowledge him.

“I wish to post an announcement on the Society Page.”

There was still no reaction from the wizard.

Harry was beginning to get impatient, “I’m speaking to you sir – and I use that term loosely – I will only say this one more time in a civil manner. I am here to place an announcement on the Society Page.”

The wizard looked up briefly and stared at the two boys down his nose. “The Society Page is reserved for important announcements from Pureblood houses. Go downstairs to the classified section to invite your friends to your birthday party. Be gone now before I call your parents.”

This was absolutely the wrong thing to say to the two young men in front of them. Before the wizard had a chance to look down and resume his active ignoring of the two he was staring at the business end of two glowing wands.

The managing editor heard the commotion as the chairs flew backwards and his Society editor yelped. He came over to see two young men threatening the same editor.

“What is the meaning of this?”

Harry never let his gaze waver as he addressed the newcomer, “Who are you?”

“I am the managing editor of this newspaper and who are you to threaten one of my editors.”

“I,” Harry started allowing his rings to become visible, “am Lord Potter-Black and my friend is the future Lord Longbottom.” The society editor paled further as Harry continued, “This sorry excuse for a wizard refused to accept an announcement from Lord Black regarding the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black. He had the audacity to tell me to put my announcement in the classified section and tactlessly brought up to two well-known orphans that he would report us to our parents. In fact, I’m not sure the Houses of Potter,

Black and Longbottom will use the services of this publication ever again.”

The managing editor paled. The one person a quarter of his staff was trying to track down for an interview was standing in his offices quite royally pissed and with good cause. “L-Lord Potter-Black, please accept my apology on behalf of the paper. If you would be so kind to give me your announcement we will ensure it makes both the evening and morning editions at no charge.”

“I also want a public apology from this idiot in front of me printed in the same editions.”

“Yes, of course Lord Potter-Black.”

Harry and Neville withdrew their wands and Harry handed the announcement to the Managing Editor. He read it. This was not going to be good for another major family with powerful connections.

“Lord Potter-Black, are you sure you want this printed?”

Harry finally turned and looked at the man as though he had just asked the most idiotic question he had ever heard. “No, I went through the trouble to come down here just to scare the shit out of this waste of magic and get insulted in the process. OF COURSE I WANT THIS PRINTED!! As head of the House of Black it is my right and responsibility. Are you saying you won’t print it?”

“No, of course not. The Ancient and Noble families have used the Prophet to publish family announcements for centuries.”

“Very well then. I assume you have a job to do. We must be off. Good day to you. I expect to see that announcement in the evening edition as promised with no modifications.”

Harry and Neville made it halfway to the Ministry before they broke down laughing.

/Scene Break/

Luna had just finished explaining her plans to Hermione, Tom and Severus.

Tom spoke up, "It seems like the best option we've had so far. Hermione, are you sure you want to go through with it."

She nodded, "Yes. I was a bit nervous when Luna first started explaining it. But now that I have a better idea of what it entails, I will go through with it. The real question is how we break it to Harry."

Luna had a mischievous look in her face, "Oh, I already have some ideas on that." She launched again into an explanation. In the end, the four had their plan and sought out Narcissa for her help as well – Severus pointed out there was no way she would want to miss out on this.

/Scene Break/

Fred returned with Bill and Fleur and let Arthur and George know that Percy was on his way. All of them had come as soon as possible once they heard the state that Arthur was in when he arrived at the Twins' shop.

Arthur had calmed down a bit (three shots of Ogden's Best had that effect on most people) but he was still distressed by the news the Healers had delivered earlier.

Once everyone was around the table Arthur made to speak and then stopped. He looked at his sons and the two young women. The look of concern on their faces for him made some of his anxiety and pain go away. He still had family he could count on and that meant a lot to him right now.

He cleared his throat and went to speak again. "I haven't been feeling the same the past few days since I left the Burrow. So, I went to the Healers at St. Mungo's today." There was a collective intake of breath at this. Arthur didn't miss it, "No, no, no. Don't worry. I'm fine – now. I'm upset by what they found but I'm healthy now."

The faces around the table relaxed visibly. Bill spoke up, "Dad, what's made you so upset then?"

"Your mother."

"Mum?" echoes from the four boys around the table.

"Yes. The Healers found traces of different potions in my bloodstream. From what they can tell, I've been exposed to them for several years."

"Did they say what potions?" Percy asked. He had an idea where this was going. Audrey had felt him tense up and had gripped his hand to give him support and hopefully relax him a bit.

"Yes Percy. I've been given a number of potions. The first one they found was an adaptation of Amorentia. Let's just say when your mother told me we had good chemistry between us, she was playing the role of chemist." He looked out at the table and the boys were stunned. The two young women looked angry.

Audrey was the first to speak, "Arthur, I am so sorry. I can't imagine how you are feeling right now."

"Actually Audrey the love potion is the one I'm the least concerned about." Seeing the quizzical look on the young woman's face he continued, "You see, if I had found out all those years ago in school about the Amorentia, I would not have these fine young men as my sons and would not have met the two very remarkable young women at this table."

George spoke up, "What were the other potions?"

"Ah, yes. There were three and I think they were all tied together. One was a compulsion potion. The Healers explained that it would cause me to follow another's lead without question. The second was meant to confuse me so I could not think with a high acuity level – think of it as dumbing me down a bit. The last was a rare mind control potion."

“Mind Control?” asked Fred.

“As in Imperious mind control?” asked George.

“Yes. This is the one that gave the Healers the most trouble in identifying. It is a very rare potion and very difficult to make. Made properly, it can hide only specific memories from a person’s conscious mind. In my case, I was dosed to forget about my Family’s wealth.”

“Wealth?” Once again all four sons responded at once.

“Yes, now that the potion’s effects are urged from my body I remember that I inherited a large amount of money when my parents died. I was made to forget this small fact. However once a month I dreamt that I was signing transfer authorizations – it wasn’t a dream.”

Arthur looked around the table again as the room lapsed into silence. He could tell by the reactions from his boys that they had not idea and were not a part of the conspiracy against him.

Fleur was doing a poor job of holding back her tears. She could not imagine anyone doing this to the man at the end of the table. She had loved Arthur from the moment she met him. He was a kind and gentle man and did not deserve this type of treatment. Only one word escaped her lips, “Why?”

It was Fred who answered with a single word of his own, “Dumbledore.”

Arthur nodded. “That’s what I figure. The Weasley fortune has been funding the Order of the Phoenix for years. It was a pretty good plan. I was tied to Molly Prewitt and Albus arranged for regular transfers to the Order, and the Dumbledore and Prewitt family vaults. The transfers were small enough that they would not raise the suspicion of the Goblins.”

Percy looked at his father with concern, “Dad you may not be safe once they find out you know.”

“Yes. I’ve already thought of that. I’m going to ask Harry if I can stay at one of his properties. I’ve already arranged with the Goblins for more stringent rules around the Weasley vault. It’s been depleted, but there are still over ten million galleons in it. “

“When are you going to go to Harry’s?” Percy asked.

“As soon we finish here, I have a note to send to your mother and I will use a mail owl from the post office. Then I will go and talk to Harry.”

Bill asked the question that was on everyone’s mind, “Dad, what are you going to say in the note?”

Everyone gasped at what Arthur told them but they all realized it was the only thing he could do. Bill volunteered to contact Charlie and let him know what was going on – up to a certain point of course.

“Thanks Bill,” said a very weary Arthur, “Charlie deserves to hear it from one of us before all hell breaks loose.”

The meeting broke up with hugs all around and everyone now had more determination to stop this Pureblood Conspiracy. They had been committed before, but now it had become very personal.

/Scene Break/

Harry and Neville had arrived at the Ministry and after checking in at the front desk (Harry remarked to Neville that Head of House rings seem to grease the gears) they presented themselves at the DMLE offices. Madame Bones’ assistant was the picture of professionalism. She addressed them with respect and offered them tea while they were waiting.

At 2pm sharp, the assistant called them over and showed them into Ms. Bones’ office. As they entered they saw the Director sitting behind a very large imposing desk. She smiled as she walked over to them and after proper introductions she motioned them over to a small sitting area with comfortable chairs and a table with tea and various pastries.

Once they were settled, Amelia started the conversation, "Lord Potter-Black, I've been meaning to speak to you for some time. I want you to know that you are not suspected of breaking any laws nor do I mean you any harm. It's just it seems that you find yourself in extraordinary situations and – if you are willing – I would like to find out more about them. But first, I would like to thank you."

Harry was floored. "Thank me Director?"

My niece Susan is the only family I have left. I fear there are dark times coming and I can't always be there to protect her. Imagine my surprise when she came home from school this year with a confidence I hadn't seen before. When I talked to her about it she talked about a new Defense club. She showed me a number of spells including a corporeal Patronus. When I asked which professor taught the club so I could thank them she said there were no professors. She explained that the club was not sanctioned by the school and that it was started by students who wanted to learn what they were not being taught by the awful woman – how to protect themselves. She then told me that you – Harry Potter – led the club and taught the students. That is my long-winded explanation of why I and I would imagine several parents, grandparents, guardians and siblings are thanking you. You gave the students in your club the skills, knowledge and confidence that they could survive an attack on them or their family."

Harry just looked down turning red, "I didn't do much. Hermione did a lot too."

Neville spoke up at this. "Don't listen to him right now Director. Harry was brilliant. He taught us lots of magic but he also taught us one very important thing."

Amelia looked over at the young Longbottom. She had known his parents well and had never seen Neville so self-assured. "And that was what?"

“To know when to run away and escape. He may have taught us a lot of defensive and offensive magic, but he stressed that the best defense was not to be in the situation in the first place.”

Amelia looked over at Harry with newfound respect, “Very wise words Lord Potter-Black. In fact it is one of the very first tenets we teach our Auror cadets. We don’t want them to die in the line of duty. Their first prerogative is to ensure that they and their team are safe. A dead reckless Auror is no use to us.”

“It’s Harry.”

“Excuse me?”

“Please, Madame Bones. I’m not really used to the whole ‘Lord’ thing yet and my friends call me Harry. I’d like us to be friends.”

Amelia smiled a warm, inviting smile, “Thank you Harry. Please call me Amelia. And Mr. Longbottom, may I call you Neville?”

Neville nodded appreciatively.

“Thank you. I’m looking forward to the rest of this meeting. Can you please excuse me for a moment?”

She got up and walked out the door and returned a few moments later.

“I’ve just cleared my calendar for the rest of the afternoon. I wanted to make sure we had time to properly talk. I knew your parents and was honoured to be their friend. Now,” she looked at Harry, “I’ve heard some wild stories from my niece and am curious just how much they were embellished by her.”

Harry answered her directly, “Well Amelia, where should I start?”

“There are three events I would like to find more information on, your second year and the petrified students, the end of the last event in the Triwizard cup, and the events at the Department of Mysteries this year.”

“Do you have a pensieve?”

“Yes.”

“Well, I can let you view my memories of these events. Neville can give you his from the DoM as well.”

/Scene Break/

Three hours later the three sat back down. Amelia was exhausted by the memories she saw. “Harry, I don’t know what to say. Voldemort is really after you. Damn the Minister – he knew and didn’t do anything. I’m sorry that the Ministry has failed you and your family.”

Harry looked over at Neville who nodded.

“Amelia, I understand why Fudge and the Headmaster did what they did. They are trying to address what they see as a threat to the Magical Society just as I see the treat and am dealing with it the best way I can. I actually have one more memory to show you.”

He got up and removed a vial from his jacket. He poured it into the pensieve.

Amelia got up and she and Harry went into the memory together.

Looking at a young Dumbledore talking to the Matron of an orphanage Amelia looked over at Harry.

“Let’s run through this memory. Once we’ve gone through it, I’ll restart it and explain.”

On their second time through, Harry explained who the Tom Riddle in this memory eventually turned out to be. He also told Amelia that he had information for her that he could not reveal in his office since he didn’t know who might be listening.

When they came out, Amelia had many more questions in her mind than when they went in. Harry put the memory back into the vial and

turned to Amelia. "Would you and Susan like to continue this conversation over dinner at my new place?"

"Yes Harry, that would be nice. Where is it?"

Harry called Jeeves and after an explanation, the elf came back with a book. Harry wrote something in the book and Amelia suddenly knew about Potter Manor. The elf disappeared with the book once Harry was done.

He looked at his watch, "its half past five now. Dinner is at eight, but I would like to explain a few more things to you and Susan before dinner."

Amelia wanted to know more of what Harry had to say, "If I floo home now we could be there between quarter past six and six thirty if that is OK."

Harry nodded. "We'll see you then."

They bid goodbye and Harry and Neville made their way out of the Ministry. Once they were at the proper location in the atrium they activated their portkeys and went back to the Manor.

/Scene Break/

To Ms. Molly Prewitt

Dear Ms. Prewitt,

This letter is to officially inform you of our divorce. As of 2pm this day I have dissolved our marriage and returned your dowry to the Prewitt family vault. As part of this divorce, I am allowing you to keep the property known as 'The Burrow' however should you decide to sell it, half the proceeds will go to me. All of our children except for Ronald and Ginevra are of age and will keep the Weasley name as their own. As for Ronald and Ginevra, they have a week to schedule a meeting with me to convince me that they still belong in the Weasley family. If they are no longer willing or are not fit to be part of the Weasley family, you may choose to adopt them into the Prewitt family.

Ms. Prewitt, I found out very recently that our so-called 'marriage' was built on lies and deception. The potions that you continually administered to me over the course of said marriage have been purged from my system and I have relayed the information I received from the Healers to our older sons. The only reason I am not prosecuting you to the fullest extent of the law is that we had a number of wonderful children and I will be forever grateful for their presence in my life.

Please also inform Albus Dumbledore that I resign my membership in the Order of the Phoenix. He too may keep the money which was transferred from the Weasley vaults however I request that he no longer try to approach me or any of my children.

I do not seek a response from you nor will I accept one. The Goblins have processed the divorce through the appropriate channels. You should be receiving official notification within the next one or two days.

Arthur Weasley

P.S. If Ronald or Ginevra wish to remain part of the Weasley family they can contact me through either Fred or George at their shop.

Molly gaped as Ginny read the note. This could not be happening. The Prewitt Amorentia had never failed in this manner and Albus said the other potions couldn't be easily traced. She had always expected to divorce Arthur but only after she had him transfer enough money to her account and now he found out about that too.

Molly was too self-absorbed in her internal ranting (not to mention the ever-present burn of white pepper residue) to notice the effect of the note on her two youngest children.

Ginny was stunned having read the note with no buffer. Her mother had always told her she took more after the Prewitt line than the Weasley one. But she had always been Ginny Weasley. Sure, her brothers were prats most of the time, but they always were there to protect her even when she didn't want them to. But to go by a different name – Ginevra Prewitt, Ginny Prewitt – "Hmmm," she

thought, “it has a better sound to it and no one will call me names which involve the word ‘weasel’. This has potential. And Mum always did teach me more stuff than Dad.”

Ron – on the other hand – was still trying to process this unexpected series of events. The past few days had been very hard on Ron’s ego. It had always been a fragile little thing and repeated attempts to squish it over the past few days had left it on life support with a less than hopeful prognosis. The will reading had been traumatic for him even though it was several hours after the reading before he realized that he had been ridiculed almost as much as Draco Malfoy.

Hermione was another story. He had always seen Hermione as his ‘practice girlfriend’. He would go out with her for the remainder of his Hogwarts years and “Practice his Wand Work’ as some of the boys called it and then find a nice pureblood who knew her place to marry and settle down with. That was the arrangement he had with Dumbledore. Then Potter had to go ahead and ruin it.

Now this. His father didn’t want his mother anymore. Ron was put in the position where he had to choose. He thought about the two options and his ego spiked for a moment – “If I’m Ronald Prewitt, then I’ll be the oldest.” His ego started reviving. His choice was clear.

Molly looked at her two youngest through burning eyes. Ginevra had to be a Prewitt. She was Molly’s pride and joy – young, smart, powerful – yes a great asset to the Prewitt line. She could see in her daughter’s face that Ginny would stay with her and she was overjoyed.

Ronald was another story. Lazy, and unmotivated with a slightly below average intelligence, the only reason he had not yet flunked out of Hogwarts was the help he extorted from the mudblood. If Molly were completely honest with herself, she would admit that Ron was a liability to her now. His only use had been to befriend and influence Potter and that plan was currently breaking up on the shores of failure. Her fear right now was that Ron would choose to be a Prewitt and by the look in his eyes he had already chosen. Now Molly had to decide whether to adopt him or not. She would speak with Ginny about this when Ron was not around.

/Scene Break/

Harry and Neville arrived back at Potter Manor to find Tom, Hermione, Severus, Luna and Narcissa in the sitting room. When he walked in they all looked at him with a glint in their eyes. Harry did not like that look. Narcissa's was especially disturbing since he saw Sirius with that look once just before he transfigured Harry's underpants into cold sticky porridge. He shivered uncontrollably at the memory.

Hermione broke the uneasy silence, "How did your meeting with Madame Bones go?" as she walked over to envelop Harry in a hug and a kiss. Luna had done the same with Neville.

"Great," Harry started explaining having forgotten the uneasy feeling from a few minutes ago, "I think she will be willing to join us. I know she wonders about Fudge and a lot of things that go on in the Ministry. She'll be here in about half an hour and we need to prepare. I've asked the elves to have dinner ready for eight o'clock and the Order meeting is at nine."

"In the meantime, I think Luna, Hermione, and Neville should remain here. Tom, I'd like to bring you into the conversation before dinner. Can you please provide some of your memories in the pensieve for Amelia to see before you meet her? I want to lessen the shock as much as possible. "

Tom nodded and walked over to the pensieve. He paused for a moment and then began extracting memories and putting them into the dish. Once he was finished he left with Severus and said he return around half past seven.

Shortly past six o'clock Arthur arrived unexpectedly. Harry greeted him and they talked in the sitting room. Everyone was appalled by what Arthur had found out at St. Mungo's. Arthur then explained his visit to Gringotts and his subsequent note to Molly.

Before Arthur could ask, Harry spoke up, "Arthur, you may not be safe once Albus finds out what you have done. I just want you to know that you can stay here if you want. If you choose not to, please

allow me to give you one of the emergency portkeys that will get you here quickly if required.”

Arthur sighed in relief, “Actually Harry I was going to ask you if you could put me up at one of your properties. I really do not want to impose on you here.”

“Nonsense!” he smiled warmly at the Weasley patriarch, “Arthur, ever since I was eleven and I met your family you have taken me into your home and treated me as one of your children. Now, granted, some of the people faked those emotions, but you and your older boys to this day treat me like an honorary Weasley. You are not imposing Arthur. How could you? You’re family.”

Arthur smiled at the remarkable young man in front of him and drew him into a hug. “Thank you Harry. After all I have been through today, I’m glad I have the love of such good people.”

Arthur went off with Jeeves to the room that had been made up for him while Harry and his friends finished preparing for Amelia’s visit.

/Scene Break/

Lucius was enjoying a fine dinner when the evening edition of the Daily Prophet landed on his table. He opened the paper carefully making sure he was not actively chewing or drinking at the same time. After reading the first few pages he ordered his elf to get him some brandy as he finished reading the paper. Taking a sip of the Brandy he turned the page to the Society section and proceeded to gag on his brandy. Luckily none of the alcoholic beverage made it into his already-weakened nasal passages. No – it didn’t have a chance. As soon as he was breathing normally again he read the page once more. The last thing Lucius thought he heard before he fainted was the spirit of Scorpius laughing at him.

Draco walked into the room to find his father unconscious and holding a copy of the Prophet. Grabbing the snifter of Brandy he took the paper and sat in one of the other chairs. Helping his father never crossed his mind as he concentrated on the newspaper in front of him.

As he got to the Society section he chuckled and thought, "This must be why the old man is passed out on the floor."

Black Family Marriage Annulment Notice

Lord Black wishes to announce the annulment of the marriage of Narcissa Black and Lord Lucius Malfoy. In accordance with tradition, Lord Malfoy repaid the bride's dowry upon the annulment of the marriage.

Lord Black wishes to make known that he took this extraordinary step to preserve the sanctity of the Noble and Ancient House of Black. It had come to his attention that Lord Malfoy had willingly sold himself into the service of another and had even allowed himself to be branded like a common farm animal as part of that service. On top of that, Lord Black became aware that Lord Malfoy's offspring was also due to receive the same brand. Previous Lord Blacks had been assured by previous scions of the Malfoy family that the rumoured family fixation with farm animals had been an aberration however Lord Black is afraid this generation of Malfoys may be slipping back into old habits. To this end, Lord Black decided he could not have a member of the House of Black being part of the current Malfoy Family.

A/N

Have you ever really gotten into a story and then up pops a chapter called Author's Note? It's always the same isn't it – this story is abandoned, on hiatus, etc. Well, I wanted to buck the trend, did I fool you?

Real life has caught up with me again so updates won't be as fast as I want them to be for either of my stories. Just for the record, this is my longest chapter to date. I have some spare time over the next few days (flying does that for me) so I hope to get another chapter of my other story written and posted by Saturday.

I've also put up a poll on my profile. I've had a number of comments that said this story wasn't classified properly. So I set up a fun poll – you tell me how it should be classified.

Till next time...

hapter 25 – Yes Amelia There is a Dumbledore

Molly, Ginny and Ron were sitting around the table at the Burrow. They were silently contemplating the note (or, in Ron's case silently contemplating the silence and how he wanted to escape it back to his room and run Quidditch plays in his brain) when Ginny spoke up.

"Mum, I want to be a Prewitt like you. Prewitt is a much better sounding strong Pureblood name. Besides I want to learn all I can from you."

Molly's heart was overjoyed. "Yes, Ginny, we'll get the papers signed tomorrow."

Ron then clued in, "Mum, I'd like to be a Prewitt too." Molly's heart sank as he continued, "There is nothing left for me as a Weasley in that I think Dad's conditions will be hard work and very restrictive."

Molly said, "If you both are adamant at not staying Weasleys then I will go down to the Ministry and fill out the appropriate paperwork."

The children were about to get up and leave when Molly said, "Ginny, can you please stay? We need some 'girl talk'."

Ron, hearing this took off as fast as he could. 'Girl talk' meant the things that a proper man should never know about.

Once he was gone, Ginny turned to Molly, "Are you really going to adopt him?"

Molly shook her head, "No. I'm going to adopt you but not Ron. By the end of the week he will be Ronald Bilius NoName. However you don't know how happy I am that you want to be a Prewitt. We are going to have so much fun!"

After a big Prewitt hug she looked at Ginny and said, "Can you leave me alone for now? I need to talk to Albus."

Ginny happily skipped off as Molly went to the floo. Soon they would be rid of the idiot once and for all.

/Scene Break/

Amelia and Susan arrived at twenty past six. Jeeves greeted them in the entrance hall and showed them to the sitting room.

Harry greeted them and introductions were made all around.

Once they were all seated, Harry spoke up, "Amelia, as I mentioned in your office, there is more information that you should know about what is going on in our world. My mother and Godfather discovered things that most people would find hard to believe. I only discovered this information the day we got back from school."

He gave Amelia and Susan the documents. Harry had given the permission for them to read them before Amelia and Susan arrived. He may like pranking people, but definitely not the Head of the DMLE – at least not before he got to know her better.

While Amelia was reading the stack of documents, Hermione gave Susan the old copy of Hogwarts – A History. Susan looked at Hermione strangely and Hermione responded with, "This may be the only know copy from it's time. Read the marked sections," she indicated about a half dozen bookmarks, "then you will get what makes this book special."

Harry, Luna Hermione and Neville sat back quietly and waited while the two visitors read. Every once in a while Harry would catch Luna and Hermione sharing knowing glances and then they would look at him briefly with a mirthful look spread across their faces. When he would gesture to Hermione to explain, she just shrugged her shoulders. He could not shake the feeling that something was up and it was starting to make him a bit nervous. The Order Eaters were very good at pranks.

Amelia was on an emotional roller coaster. She had gone from incredulity to dismay, through denial and was not just plain angry. This "Pureblood Conspiracy" was too surreal for her to initially comprehend, but by the time she got to the end of the documents she saw the puzzle pieces falling into place. "Merlin," she thought, "no

wonder no one ever saw it. This has been going on for generations. The fact that the Bones family was not on the trusted list was not lost on her. It made her feel Susan and her were vulnerable.

The heirs of the founders are the key and she thought she figured out three of the identities based on the clues. Harry is probably Gryffindor, Hermione is Ravenclaw and based on Lily's deductions Luna was Hufflepuff. That just left the heir of Slytherin. No one had claimed that for years. There were those rumours going around ..." Her brain froze.

Luna saw the look in Amelia's face and knew she just made the leap. "Amelia, you look shocked."

"Luna, it's about the heirs. Based upon what I've read you, Hermione, and Harry are the heirs of Hufflepuff, Ravenclaw and Gryffindor. Am I correct?" She continued once she saw the three nods, "Now that leaves the heir of Slytherin. That title had not been claimed for at least a half-century and then it was a crazy old pureblood named Gaunt. However there were rumours that he-who-must..." she caught Harry's look of dismay, "I mean Voldemort. Well there were rumours that he said he was the heir of Slytherin but it was never proven."

Hermione spoke up, "Amelia, Harry told us he showed you the memory of Albus Dumbledore in the orphanage changing the living conditions for a Thomas Riddle."

Amelia nodded. Susan looked up with a quizzical look on her face. Hermione saw it and said, "We can show you that later."

Turning back to Amelia, Hermione continued her tale, "Well Tom Riddle was obviously an orphan, but when he was born his name appeared on the Hogwarts register..." she let that hang in the air.

Amelia spoke up, "He was a wizard then. But this doesn't make sense. I don't remember a Magical family named Riddle. So the boy would have been muggleborn and was in a muggle orphanage. It doesn't answer why Dumbledore went out of his way to make the boy's life a living hell."

Luna spoke next, “Oh, he knew something about the boy which he tries to keep secret to this day. You see Thomas Riddle is named after his father – a muggle – who was under the effects of a love potion administered to him by the child’s mother. Her name was Merope Gaunt. Tom Riddle Senior left Merope after she discontinued the love potions and he realized what she had done. We suspect he never knew she was pregnant and she is believed to have died shortly after giving birth.”

Amelia sat back as the implications of this started to hit home. “But he was the last heir of a founder. Why would... oh – the prophecy. He wanted to do something to the heir of Slytherin.”

Harry nodded grimly, “That incident at the orphanage was the first but far from the last time Dumbledore interfered with young Tom Riddle’s life. In fact Tom Riddle will be coming by before dinner. However he did leave some memories for you to see beforehand. Would you like to see them now?”

Amelia and Susan nodded and they went over to the pensieve. Harry watched their body language as they relived some of Tom’s memories. They showed the steps that led him along the way to becoming Lord Voldemort. When Amelia and Susan came out it was shortly before half past seven.

Amelia looked at Harry. “Harry, if what you showed me is correct then Tom Riddle is Lord Voldemort.”

Harry nodded.

“And Voldemort has committed horrible acts.”

Harry nodded.

“But yet you received these memories from him.”

Harry nodded again.

Amelia started to become nervous, “Harry, have you led me into a trap?”

Neville jumped in because he saw where she was going, "Amelia, this is not a trap. Voldemort has been trying to kill Harry. You saw that in his memories from school right."

It was Amelia's turn to nod.

"Well Harry found a way to safely explain all of this information to Tom and when he realized that Dumbledore had manipulated his life and that even his own Death Eaters took orders from Dumbledore he had a change of heart. He is really trying to reform himself and has even gone through a painful reintegration of one of the horcruxes."

Amelia relaxed a bit. Hermione looked behind Amelia and saw Tom standing there. She said, "The Bones family is on the list of those not trusted. While you may think it hard now, we trust Tom. He is one of the four founders and we need him just as much as he needs us to thwart this pureblood conspiracy. Would you like to at least meet him before you make up your minds?"

Both Bones women nodded slowly. Hermione gestured behind them. "Amelia and Susan Bones, meet Thomas Marvolo Riddle, last remaining heir of Salazar Slytherin."

Tom approached slowly and took each woman's hand in turn and kissed it just above the knuckle.

Once the initial nervousness was over, Tom answered all of Amelia's questions as Susan went through the memory of the orphanage. Amelia was still undecided when the call for dinner came but she thought she knew which side she was leaning toward.

/Scene Break/

Albus Dumbledore shook his head sadly at the announcement in the Prophet. He looked up at the ceiling of his office and said to no one in particular, "Harry my boy. I'm not sure what possessed you to publish this notice. The Malfoy line is all but dead now."

It was true. The note had all but said that Lucius was a marked Death Eater. Adoption was almost all but impossible. No agency would allow it and there weren't that many pureblood orphaned children past the age of fifteen.

(A/N – in my wizarding world an orphan aged 15 or higher can decide for themselves if they wish to be adopted into a willing family).

Lucius' political capital was worthless now too. Albus shuddered to think of the animal sounds that will once again echo through the Wizengamot if Lord Malfoy shows his face again.

Albus was interrupted as his fireplace flared. "Albus, it's Molly. May I come through?"

"Of course."

The fire flared again and Molly Weasley stepped out. Albus was shocked by her appearance. Her eyes were bloodshot and her nose was beet red.

"Molly what happened to you? Do you need to see Poppy?"

"It was a little accident with white pepper. I think I will see Poppy before I leave but I need to discuss something else with you first."

"Absolutely," he said clasping his hands together with a twinkle in his eyes, "Lemon drop?"

"No thank you Albus." Not being one above using potions on other, Molly could spot a potion delivery system from a mile away. She noticed that Albus never ate the lemon drops from the dish on his desk that he offered to guests. He had his own private stash.

"Albus I need to talk to you about this," she handed him the note. Albus paled as he read it and the twinkle disappeared. "There goes another source of funds," he thought as he turned to Molly, "And Ms. Prewitt I presume? Have you talked to you two youngest children?"

“Yes, neither wishes to remain a Weasley. I’m going to adopt Ginny as a Prewitt tomorrow.”

“And Ronald?”

“I can’t see any use for him Albus. He wants to be a Prewitt as well but I talked it over with Ginny. I won’t adopt him and in a week he will be Ronald NoName.”

Albus surprised Molly with a look of joy in his face. “This will work out well Molly. May I accompany you to the Ministry tomorrow? I have a proposition for Ronald NoName.”

/Scene Break/

Dinner at the Potters was a very lively affair. Many conversations took place at once and everyone quickly accepted Amelia and Susan. Halfway through dinner Amelia looked around the table – the sight that greeted her eyes warmed her heart. Seated around the table talking and laughing was a cross-section of the wizarding world. Pureblood, half-blood and muggleborn, young and old, “Dark” and “Light” (not that those labels really meant anything), male and female all sat around the table as equals. This was how the whole wizarding world should be – not the one created by Albus Dumbledore and the families in the conspiracy.

She marveled at how fast she had taken a liking to Tom Riddle. She had a hard time equating the polite, charming man beside her with the image of the ‘Dark Lord’ even though his physical appearance still strongly resembled Voldemort. He was trying to change and Tom and Harry had explained the reintegration of the Horcrux and what it entailed. She was not surprised when Tonks arrived for dinner. Once she had been briefed on the information she knew why Tonks’ loyalties lay with this group. Amelia herself found her loyalties to the Ministry of Magic dissipating as well. She had been concerned for a long time about where Fudge was going with the Ministry but had never had a viable alternative. Now she had one and was quickly warming up to the idea.

As she looked around the table again her eyes stopped on Harry. She marveled at the young man. Her first impression today was that Harry was very shy and reserved – who could blame him after the life he had led. However once you gained his trust, he relaxed and showed a very charismatic side of his personality. He was outgoing and just exuded a natural sense of leadership. Amelia saw what his ‘club’ saw in him – a leader who would go to any lengths to keep them safe. She also didn’t fail to notice that Hermione was always at his side. Together they made a very nice couple.

Some of the people around the table were a surprise. Narcissa Malfoy – no Narcissa Black – was a surprise – especially the change in name and marital status. Severus Snape was another surprise. The usually dour and snarky potions master was also displaying a quite charming side particularly around a certain Ms. Black.

Amelia was also surprised with herself and Susan. Once the initial shock of the whole conspiracy had worn off she and her niece seemed to be welcomed and fit in almost immediately. Her whole worldview was in a state of upheaval because of these people here and yet she felt more comfortable than she did anywhere at the Ministry.

Just before nine more people started arriving. She was surprised to see many of the Weasley children especially Percy who was rumoured to have split from his family. He had brought along his girlfriend who Amelia recognized as one of the Canadian witches working in the Consular office.

Harry invited Susan and Amelia to stay for their meeting as everyone made their way to the sitting room. The elves seemed to be able to adapt the room to fit everyone comfortably. Harry stood up.

“OK, I’m glad to see everyone here. The first thing I want to do tonight is welcome Amelia and Susan Bones. I think they’ll both be an invaluable addition to our cause.”

Everyone greeted Amelia and Susan warmly. Harry continued, “Now we were supposed to have this meeting yesterday but it was

postponed because Tom went through reintegrating one of his Horcruxes. I think Tom can best explain how that went.”

Tom got up and looked around at everyone. “I was able to successfully reintegrate the Horcrux performing the reintegration ritual after consuming the required potion. Yes, Audrey you have a question?”

Audrey looked at him, “Tom I’m wondering about the potion. If creating a horcrux requires a ritual before committing murder, how does a potion help with the reintegration?”

“The potion prepares the host – in this case me – to accept the soul fragment back into my body and bind it with my remaining soul. Without the potion it would be harder to bind and I would most likely end up with a fractured soul.” He noticed not only Audrey but also many of the group were now nodding with a new understanding.

He continued on, “I performed the ritual and the reintegration was successful if not painful. The Horcrux container was destroyed in the process. Now in case you are wondering what happened during the reintegration, I have talked it over with the other heirs and I will share the memory of the process at the end of the meeting.”

“The fact that the Horcrux vessel was destroyed is very discouraging since we all know that a few days ago we discovered that when Harry deflected my curse as an infant I unwittingly made a Horcrux out of him when I ‘died’. So a few of us have been researching all day today to see if there is a way we can save Harry and safely remove the Horcrux from him. Successfully reintegrating the Horcrux back into me is secondary to Harry’s safety.”

Before he could continue Fred and George got up. Fred started and they lapsed into their twin speak, “Actually my brother and I”

“Came up with the perfect answer.”

“Harry will go and tell Dumbledore”

“He knows everything about the conspiracy.”

“And that he has”

“A whole group of people who know”

“And are willing to fight the purebloods”

“Dumbledore will try to convince Harry”

“To tell him who these people are”

“And convince him to change sides.”

“Harry will tell him”

“He would rather die than reveal the names”

“Or join the Purebloods.”

“Harry has to willingly”

“Let Albus cast the killing curse at him.”

“Without fighting back.”

“Harry’s selfless sacrifice”

“Will protect us all from Albus”

“Like Harry’s mother’s sacrifice protected him.”

“But Harry won’t die because Albus”

“Will have killed the Horcrux.”

And then in unison they said, “Problem solved.”

There was silence in the room for a second and then Hermione got up.

“You mean to suggest that Harry willingly sacrifice himself for the off-chance that the killing curse will just home in on the Horcrux and kill just it instead of Harry?”

The twins grinned and nodded.

Hermione continued, “That is the stupidest idea I ever heard. Where in Merlin’s name did you come up with it?”

“Well, we just sat around and thought”

“What would Dumbledore do?”

“And we figured based on his history with Harry,”

“That he knew about the Horcrux and would have said”

“Something similar about going to face Tom.”

“We just wanted to see”

“If anyone here”

“Was gullible enough to buy it.”

That released the tension in the room as everyone had a good laugh. Many however could not shake the feeling that the twins may have been spot on in their assessment of Dumbledore’s motives toward Harry.

As everyone settled back down Harry could see that glint in Hermione’s and Luna’s eyes that he saw earlier. Hermione started to speak, “Actually Harry, Luna came up with a better solution which we think is a better solution.”

Luna got up and walked up to the front of the room. “The answer was quite simple really. I just looked at the Horcrux in Harry as though he was being possessed by the soul of a deceased person. There are many magical ways to exorcise a possessed person, but there is only one thing that will help anchor the person’s own soul in their bodies.”

Harry was very interested, "What's that Luna?"

"A soul bond of course."

There were gasps around the room. Harry didn't get it, "Luna, I've never heard of soul bonds. What are they?"

Hermione spoke up instead of Luna, "Harry, haven't you ever read Teen Witch Weekly? They mention soul bonds at least once every issue. But the problem is that they have mentioned a number of ways of a soul bond forming namely:"

"Growing up close with your true love."

"Sharing a deep and meaningful kiss with the one and only person you are destined to be with."

"The first time you make love with your one and only. Sometimes they even write about bright lights and loud sounds as the bond establishes."

"Where was I, oh yeah – Touching your true soul mate for the first time."

"And finally my personal favourite – saving someone you truly love from certain death."

Harry was confused about this and it was showing. Luna now continued, "But in reading about soul bonds in the library here at the manor, I realized they were all wrong for the most part. First of all you have to find someone you love. Someone whose happiness you put ahead of yours and who feels the same way about you."

"Secondly there is a ritual. Both parties must partake in the ritual willingly and without apprehension. I will get back to the ritual shortly."

"The soul bond when complete will anchor both souls to their respective bodies. It should make sure that the Horcrux will be the only soul extracted from your body and the bond will also ensure your

body does not get consumed when the Horcrux is removed. Bonded can also sense each other's emotions even over great distances."

Narcissa spoke up, "Luna you forgot some of the other side effects. You will be considered married in the eyes of the wizarding world. If one of you dies the other will die within hours. You can never separate for more than a few days at most. You will share your magic with each other and become extremely powerful. You will be driven to procreate."

Harry had grown noticeable paler. Especially when Hermione came up to him and started stroking his arm with a hungry look on her face. "Harry," she said, "I want to bond with you."

Harry was touched by the love and scared shitless about everything else. Just when he thought the moment could not get more uncomfortable, Severus spoke up, "We forgot to explain the ritual. You and Hermione must make love on a ritual pedestal – in the centre of Stonehenge, at the precise moment of the Equinox. The rest of us will form a circle and chant the bonding chant."

"What you will be there?" Harry asked. This was getting worse for him all the time.

"Yes Harry, Don't worry about embarrassment, we will all need to be naked as well."

Harry could not answer because at this point he fell back in his chair. Visions of everyone around him in the room being naked and watching as he and Hermione, well, you know. A terrible thought came into his mind, "Hermione, your parents..."

"Will be there too," she interrupted. "I've already explained it to them and while they were reluctant at first they agreed to participate since it will make the bond stronger."

Harry had not turned very white. "Th-th-they have to be there too?"

“The more relatives you have there helps strengthen the bond. We even wanted to invite your relatives when they get back from vacation. Unless you think it’s better not to invite them.”

The thought of naked Dursleys was too much to bear. Harry fell back in his seat and looked like he was about to pass out. Suddenly he heard the snickers and then full out laughter. He looked around and suddenly he knew why Hermione and Luna had that look all day.

“What?” He said which only caused the laughter to get louder. Hermione came and sat on his lap wrapping her arms around him. “Harry, most of it was a joke. We wanted to see how embarrassed you would get.”

Harry finally got it and pouted, “That is so not funny.” Hermione grabbed him down into a kiss. That got him to lighten up.

“OK, OK.” He said to everyone, “Now how much of that was real?”

Luna ticked off on her fingers, “Bond anchors soul, able to sense emotions, there is a ritual but has nothing to do with Stonehenge and copulating in front of naked Dursleys.”

“What is the ritual then?”

Hermione bit her lip for a moment and then said, “We have to swear our love and souls to each other. That’s is the most dangerous part – if we fail, one or both of us could die. The oath will only work on two people truly in love. There could be other side effects, the last known bonding was so long ago there is no detailed record.”

“Harry, I want to go through with this. I can’t afford to lose you – I love you too much. What you have to decide is if you love me as much as I love you.”

Over the past week, Harry had begun to realize that what he did feel was love. “Yes Hermione, I do love you.” He kissed her again. As he hugged her he whispered in her ear, “but I’m still going to get you guys back for that prank.” She smiled and hugged him tighter.

Severus spoke up again, "Can you two please take it outside. We need to continue this meeting."

Harry got up again and addressed the room, "Now that we have our group together we need to plan how we are going to approach our common problem. Our highest priority is to get the rest of the Horcruxes back into Tom. With any luck, once we have Tom Riddle back and whole we can get rid of Lord Voldemort once and for all and force Dumbledore's hand. The second thing we have to do is for the four of us to walk into Hogwarts together as friends and allies. According to the prophecy we need to do that to wake the castle. Unlike the two groups who we take our name from, we don not need a group that is driven from the top down. You are all competent, intelligent wizards and witches. I suggest we split into working subgroups. For instance, Amelia, Tonks, Percy, Audrey and Arthur should probably get together and come up with a strategy for dealing with the Ministry to collect information immediately and long term plans to deal with the purebloods in charge. Fred, George, Remus and Severus – you can work on how to demoralize our foes and also weapons such as potions or pranks. Narcissa, Andromeda and Augusta can work out a strategy to either neutralize the Wizengamot or swing enough of the votes to our side. Susan, you can help us with our planning to get to Hogwarts. Bill and Fleur, Griphook and Ragnok know that you side with us. See if you can work with them and come up with ideas to legally hinder their finances. Luna, you and your father can also come up with a public relations campaign.

Harry was amazed at how fast the working groups got together to strategize. Amelia noticed once again the leadership qualities in Harry and the fact that he came up with teams and responsibilities off the top of his head and now the whole group was enthusiastically working with it.

The meeting broke up shortly thereafter with the individual groups agreeing to meet and go over ideas for action. Tom put his memories of the reintegration into the penseive and the group took turns viewing it. All came out with the same thought – they did not envy what Tom Riddle had to go through to get himself back.

Amelia was especially affected by the scene of Tom with his father's family – her heart went out to the man in front of her but at the same time she knew that it was necessary for him to face the consequences of his actions.

/Scene Break/

After the meeting Harry had bid everyone goodnight and had returned to his room. After a long, hot shower he changed into his pajamas and was surprised as he walked out of the bathroom to see Hermione in his bed waiting for him. He stopped dead in his tracks.

"Um, hi," he said as he tried to act cool while his teenage hormones started going into high gear, "couldn't sleep?"

Hermione giggled to herself at his awkwardness. She patted the bed next to her and said, "Come over here and get in bed. I had a great night's sleep last night once you calmed down and I'd like to try it without all the screaming at the beginning," adding silently to herself, "at least for now." That silent thought put a smile on her face and made her blush.

Harry thought about how nice it was to wake up with Hermione and made his way to the bed. He got under the covers with her and they lay on their sides facing each other. Both of them silently stared into the others eyes until Harry noticed something.

"Hermione, what's bothering you?"

"Oh Harry, it has to do with the soul bond."

"Are you having second thoughts? I don't want you to do anything you don't want to."

"Harry, you can't force a soul bond to form. If you tried to force a soul bond to form between two people who didn't love each other the backlash would probably kill them. The two people have to be very sure they are in love with each other before they attempt the bonding."

“Then what is bothering you?”

Hermione surprised him by enveloping him in a hug. He quickly got over his surprise and hugged her back. While the feeling was very nice, he became concerned as he felt small movements through her body and realized she was crying. “Hermione?” He started to stroke her hair gently. “Hermione, please tell me what’s wrong?”

“It’s not fair Harry. Why do you have to put up with so much shit in your life? Why do you always have to be the one life wants to dump on? Why do you have to be an effing Horcrux?” The sobs started to lessen as she relaxed in Harry’s arms.

“Hermione, it’s OK. Like you guys said, the soul bond will protect me and we’ll be able to get rid of the Horcrux.” He pulled back enough so that they were face-to-face. “There’s something more.” I wasn’t a question. “Hermione, if you can’t go through with the bond I understand.”

Hermione quickly realized what he meant and said, “Harry James Potter, never ever think that I don’t love you with all my heart and soul. The reason I’m worried is that there are other possible side effects or outcomes we didn’t discuss in front of everyone.”

“Hermione, please don’t cry. They can’t be that bad.” Harry said this as he wiped her tears from her face and kissed her lightly. “What are these other side effects?”

“There’s quite a few Harry. I need to just collect my thoughts for a moment.” She took a few deep breaths. Being this close to Harry did calm her down, but she was having a hard time concentrating on talking being this close to him.

“OK. Let’s start with the bonding. There are a number of things that can happen with the bond. First of all, the bond could end up being permanent. We would always have a connection between us.”

“And this is a problem how?”

“Harry, what happens when you find the woman you want to spend your life with? You don’t want to stay connected to me.”

“Hermione, Being the head of multiple family lines, I need to be very picky about who I would Marry. There are appearances to keep up.”

Hermione looked downtrodden and appeared to be ready to cry again. She had been hoping that Harry would not agree so quickly with her last statement. She looked at him again as he continued – bracing herself for the next words.

“And so I would need to choose someone who has a title as well, perhaps Lady Ravenclaw. I’m not sure anyone could top that.”

Hermione couldn’t bring herself to say anything. In all her worries she had forgotten that she had yet to claim her title. She just hugged Harry as hard as she could.

He backed away so he could see her face again. “Hermione, being permanently bonded to you is not a bad side effect in my eyes.”

“Oh Harry!” She kissed him deeply as she once again realized why she loved this wizard.

Once the kiss was over she continued, “There is also the possibility that we will be able to read the other’s mind. We may not be able to shield out thoughts from each other. The books inferred that this had happened before, but there was no concrete examples.”

“I think that would take us both some getting used to. I’m worried for you though since sometimes I’m not even comfortable with my own brain. What else?”

“Well, there are things that can happen during the Horcrux removal. Instead of doing just the Horcrux reintegration ritual, we thought it better to try an exorcism first to get the soul fragment out of your body and then direct the reintegration ritual at it instead of you.”

“Sounds like a good plan.”

"It was the best we could come up with. But and exorcism is very tricky. If it is done wrong the soul fragment could integrate with your soul instead of being expelled. The soul bond should strengthen your soul against that, but Tom is very powerful and there is a small chance it could overpower the protections of the soul bond. If that happens his soul fragment will integrate with both our souls. Harry, there was one documented case of possession where the integration happened. The person only survived for a few days. And that wasn't even a full soul fragment possessing the person."

"So you are saying the 'safest' method of removing the Horcrux could end up killing us both? Hermione, I'm not sure this is ..."

"Harry James Potter," she said for the second time that night, "it is only a possibility. I'm willing to risk it because I think our bond would be so strong that nothing could interfere with it." She said this to him in a firm, no-nonsense voice and he could see the passion blazing in her eyes.

"I just don't want to lose you."

"Harry, I don't want to lose you! Harry you should remember I am the person in this relationship who thinks things through. I'm the worrier about what might happen. I'm the one who sat with my parents for two hours this afternoon going over all of the possibilities." Tears started flowing again. "When I saw what was left of the Horcrux, I imagined it was you. Harry, I. Can't. Lose. You. This is the best way for us to continue. We don't think Hogwarts will accept Tom if any of his Horcruxes exist and I don't think you can live a long life with it stuck in your head. This is the best way to get rid of it."

Harry wiped her tears away again. "Hermione, I don't care about any more of the potential complications. You are right. If you've planned and researched this and want to go ahead with it then I will trust you to make the decision for both of us. I just have one question though, why did you guys prank me earlier."

She blushed and looked down, "It was really Luna's idea first. She wanted you to loosen up a bit more and thought that the prank would be a good idea. As soon as Severus and Tom heard it they were on

board and Severus brought Narcissa into it as well. I thought it would be good fun as well. I ... I'm sorry if we embarrassed you too much." She looked down, refusing to meet his eyes.

He lifted her chin so he was looking straight into her chocolate brown eyes, "It was brilliant," he whispered softly, "I mean, how can I be the son of Marauders, part of the Potter and Black lines, and a friend of the Weasley twins and not be able to appreciate a good prank even if I was the target." He chuckled remembering the pranks and then an involuntary shudder went through him.

Immediately concerned, Hermione asked, "What's wrong?"

He shook his head to try and clear the thought and said, "The image of naked, chanting Dursleys."

Hermione shuddered at the image in her head and they both started giggling.

They lay for a while just looking into each other's face and smiling the silly stupid smile that young people in love seem to have no problem getting. After a while Harry asked the question that had been on his mind when he first entered the room to find her there, "Hermione, do your parents know you are here? I don't want your dad to kill me."

"Yes. After waking up yesterday morning in your arms, it felt so right that I knew this was where I wanted to spend my nights. I talked with them about it this afternoon when we were talking about the soul bond."

"And what was there reaction?"

"Harry, you have to understand that the past few years have been hard on my parents. As soon as I started going to Hogwarts, they felt they started losing their daughter. They could not protect me where I was going and it scared them. Over the years they've heard about the things we've been up to and came to realize that while I was in danger and they could not do anything they could trust in one thing – you. This summer when I told them about us as a couple they were shocked, but the few days they've spent here and with us they can

see that we both care very deeply for each other. They may not be completely comfortable with me being here, but they understand why. They remember being young and in love.”

She paused and blushed, “They had one request though.”

“What is it?”

“They don’t want grandchildren for a few more years.”

Harry paused for a moment before he realized what they meant. “Oh. Oh my. Um. Hermione. Um. I’m not sure I’m ready for that yet.”

Hermione looked at him. “Harry, I’m not sure I am either. Let’s not worry about it right now. There’s no pressure to do anything we aren’t ready for,” her expression changed and there was a glint in her eye, “unless,” she said in her best husky voice, “you really want to take a trip to Stonehenge.”

Harry looked at her in shock. She started shaking again then she snorted and started laughing. It broke the tension and he started laughing too. They ended up again in each other’s arms.

“Hermione?” Harry pulled back and looked at her again, “Do you know what needs to be done to perform the bond?”

“Yes, we need to point our wands at each other’s heart and say the incantation – it’s actually more of an oath.”

“OK Let’s do it.”

“Are you sure?”

“Hermione, I don’t think that waiting will change anything. If you are ready I am too.”

“OK”

Harry and Hermione retrieved their wands and Hermione had Harry repeat the words a few times to make sure he knew them.

They sat up on the bed facing each other. They drew their wand and each pointed them at the other's heart."

"I Hermione Jean Granger swear to the Magical Realm that I intend to bond my soul with that of Harry James Potter-Black. I love him with all my heart and soul." A bright white pulse jumped from her wand into Harry's heart and a tendril of light emerged from her chest and connected to Harry's chest.

"I Harry James Potter-Black swear to the Magical Realm that I intend to bond my soul to Hermione Jean Granger. I love her with all my heart and soul." A similar pulse emerged from Harry's wand and another tendril of light appeared. This one connected Harry to Hermione. Once both tendrils were in place the two were pulled together so that their bodies were touching and when their lips met there was a bright flash. When the light died down, Harry and Hermione collapsed unconscious onto the bed.

A/N – OK, so now you know it's a soul bond. However I don't want this story to turn into the "invincible soul-bonded couple" story. Not that there is anything wrong with those, but there are a lot of them. No, the soul bond will have its side effects – some bad, some good and some ... well let's just say I may have 'fun' with this.

For those who are reading The Power He Knows Not I know I promised another chapter, but I had to get this plot bunny out of my head first. The response I got to my last chapter was so great I just had to write this one. I also wanted to make sure any readers who didn't read the "Author's Note" would get a chance when they saw this chapter.

TTFN

Chapter 26 – Bonded When the Minutes Drag

Harry woke up in the same position he had fallen the previous night. It took a moment for the 'morning fog' to clear and memories of last night flooded back into his head. He remembered performing the ritual and then the kiss before everything went black. Looking around the room at the light streaming in he knew it must be morning probably between eight and nine.

He looked at Hermione and was tempted to wake her, but she looked so peaceful in her sleep that he carefully got out of bed and went to have his morning shower. As he was standing under the hot shower letting the water wash away his cares he realized something – he felt different. It was a wonderful feeling; for once he felt the weight of the world missing from his shoulders. He wondered if it had to do with Hermione's declaration of love last night, the new soul bond with her, or something else.

"Merlin," he thought, "maybe we dodged all the nasty side effects of the bond. I can't believe how good I feel."

He actually felt so good as he came out of the shower he started singing one of his favourite songs silently to himself – with a few modifications.

The word that would best describe this feeling

Would be BONDED

Back in the bedroom Hermione stirred. She heard the shower stop.

I touch the clothes you left behind

And still retain their shape and lines

Still BONDED

Now awake, she could not believe Harry was such a bad singer.

I trace the outline of your eyes

We're in the mirror hypnotized

I'm BONDED

She tried to pull a pillow over her head to block out the noise.

I find a solitary hair

Gone and still I reminisce

I'm BONDED

The pillow didn't even muffle the sound. She sat up and looked at the bathroom door opening. "Oh no," she thought.

BONDED to your SOUL

BONDED to ...

Harry's song was cut off as Hermione demonstrated a heretofore unknown ability to hurl a pillow across the room with such unerring accuracy at Harry's head that many professional Chasers would never believe she was not a Quidditch player.

"OW. What was that for?" Harry complained to a now relieved Hermione.

"Harry, were you singing?"

"Yeah. I was feeling good until you threw the pillow at me."

"Were you singing out loud?"

"No, I never have. I kind of got into the habit of singing in my head so Uncle Vernon wouldn't have an excuse to punish me."

"Harry. I threw the pillow at you because you were singing too loud."

“But Hermione, I just told you I was ... oh ... OH!” The realization of what she said took a moment to register – then it kind of smacked him in the frontal lobe in very much the same way the pillow had, “you heard me in your head.”

“Exactly, I can hear your thoughts.” She walked over and embraced him. “Harry dear, I love you with all my heart. But let me tell you – when you sing in your mind, you sing off-key. I didn’t think something like that was possible. To make matters worse in this case, I actually like that song.”

“You do? I never knew that.”

“Harry, don’t try to change the subject. This is serious.” Suddenly the image of a smirking Sirius came into her mind, “Stop that!” The image disappeared. “Harry, we need to find a way to block each other’s thoughts.”

Harry smirked, “Why? It doesn’t seem that bad.” All of a sudden he felt a strong love and the image of Hermione kissing him. Just as he was getting used to it, it was quickly replaced by the image and sounds of Hermione having a discussion with her mother about certain feminine hygiene products and differences between the muggle and magical world in how women dealt with ... “STOP!” he yelled this time. “OK, I can see what you mean.” He had turned very pale. “I agree. Let’s talk to Severus and Tom. Maybe Occlumency can help. Do you think we can finish getting ready without transmitting too many thoughts and images?”

“I think so. But Harry, until this is sorted out,” she glared at him, “No. More. Singing.”

He looked down and pouted, “OK. I’ll try and remember for the sake of your sanity. But I don’t want to know any more about tampons than I already know.”

“Deal,” she said as she looked at him. They stared at each other for a few more moments before Harry lost it and cracked up. Hermione followed and the two hung on to each other laughing. Once they stopped, they just looked in each other’s eyes and moved to kiss

when Hermione snorted and started laughing again and this set Harry off again.

They both knew it was going to be a long day.

/Scene Break/

Molly Weasley made breakfast for her two remaining children. They were going to go down to the Ministry offices this morning where she would see about legally adopting Ginny as Ginevra Molly Prewitt. She wasn't quite sure that she could until Arthur officially disowned her, but she could at least get the papers submitted for when Arthur got around to doing it.

She still wasn't sure what to tell Ron. She knew she would tell him and give him a chance to make it up to his father. Ronald Bilius NoName had a certain pathetic ring to it. Either way, she would have to cut ties with him quite soon.

The two children came down to breakfast and Molly voiced her concerns that the adoption would have to wait for Arthur to disown them.

"Actually Mum," Ginny said, "I expect he'll be doing just that first thing this morning."

"What makes you think that?"

"Well," Ron piped up, "Ginny had this great idea after you talked to us yesterday. Since you wanted to go down and fill out the adoption papers today we both wrote Dad last night with our decision. We asked if he could disown us as soon as possible so that we could take the Prewitt name."

Molly saw the smirk on Ginny's face. She was playing one final prank on her brother knowing full well Molly didn't want him and now Arthur was going to toss him out of the Weasley family.

Molly looked at her daughter with a conspiratorial look and thought, "What a conniving little thing. No wonder Albus had to arrange with

the hat to keep her out of Slytherin like he did for me. Well, Ronald Bilius NoName it will be.”

She wondered idly what Albus had in mind for the boy and realized that she simply didn’t care.

/Scene Break/

At exactly nine o’clock morning clerk for the business permit office at the Ministry of Magic sat down at her desk and opened up for the day. Once all her forms were in place she looked up to see the first person of the day was a rather stylishly dressed wizard with long white hair. She smiled and greeted the man, “Good morning to you sir, how may I help you?”

The man answered in a very disdainful voice, “I’m here to renew a permit for my ancestral family business. I have the paperwork right here.” He slid a sheaf of parchment towards her.

“Very well Mr.,” she looked at the forms, “Oh for give me, Lord Malfoy. All of the paperwork is in order. Please give me a moment.”

Malfoy nodded and looked around nervously. He was taking a risk showing his face at the Ministry. As long as he didn’t bump into any Aurors or Dumbledore he should be OK. Fudge had ordered the identities of the Death Eaters captured in the DoM concealed. Most of the wizarding population did not even know that he had been incarcerated, let alone escaped. He looked back as the young clerk reappeared.

“Lord Malfoy, everything is in order. However this permit expired over a century ago. There is a mandatory waiting period of ten days before we can approve it in case there are any challenges to this license. We will have the notice printed in the Prophet this afternoon.”

Lucius smiled, “Yes, I expected that would be the case. Please do what you must do and alert me if there are any challenges. If I do not hear from you I will be back in ten days for my permit.”

“Is there anything else I can help you with today?”

“No that is all. Good day.”

“Have a nice day Lord Malfoy.”

/Scene Break/

Outside the permit office, an Auror team had been dispatched once they received a tip that the escapee Lord Malfoy had been spotted. The team evacuated the hall and waited for Malfoy to leave the office – there were too many clerks and other civilians in the office to take him down there. The plan was to take him quietly in the hallway where they had established control.

The door opened and the Aurors tensed but relaxed as a young man with a dark beard left the office. The point auror who was posing as a cleaner got a good look at him and it was not their prey. The man was allowed to pass and the aurors waited again.

Nearly thirty minutes elapsed before they realized Malfoy had given them the slip again.

/Scene Break/

It was half past nine when Arthur left the ministry flanked by Bill and Fleur. He was distraught and asked Bill and Fleur to accompany him while he did one of the emotionally hardest things he ever had to do – disown his own flesh and blood.

The twins had contacted him early this morning with notes from Ron and Ginny. Both had – in no uncertain terms – expressed their desire to be free of the Weasley name and become the Prewitts they now knew they should have been all along.

Arthur hoped that Molly would adopt them. He had a feeling though that Molly would let Ron flap in the metaphorical breeze. In part of his heart he hoped that all turned out well for Ginevra Prewitt and Ronald NoName.

Bill and Fleur took him back to Harry's for some breakfast. The past few days had been tough and all the brothers had agreed that someone would be with Arthur at all times. Charlie was even due in this afternoon.

Shortly after they disappeared, Molly along with Ron and Ginny appeared at the entrance to the Ministry.

/Scene Break/

Amelia Bones was sitting down to breakfast with Susan and the two of them were discussing the meetings from the previous day. Amelia had shown Susan how to cast silencing charms and wards and also how to detect several types of surveillance charms. They were not taking any chances – even in their home – to let the word out that they knew about the conspiracy.

Up until this summer, Amelia had been used to treating Susan like a child. However when she had come back from school for the summer she found that her niece was starting to turn into a self-confident young woman and was surprised by the depth of magic she had learned under Harry's tutelage. She had even taken Susan down and tested her in some of the Auror training rooms and found she knew some of the Auror Academy spells and charms better than the cadets did.

The effect of all this is that she had started to confide in her niece and found that Susan had a very mature outlook and sometimes came up with suggestions to problems that Amelia's had not thought of. If anything, the two were becoming much closer than they ever had been which surprised Amelia since she had been expecting quite the opposite, as Susan got older.

Amelia's had been going over some of her plans for the Order Eaters' infiltration of the Ministry. Using Susan as a sounding board, they came up with a number of good initiatives that Amelia could bring up with her subgroup at lunch. She had already reserved a private room at a sushi restaurant in a trendy upscale section of Muggle London a few kilometers from the Ministry. The chance of running into any

wizards – especially purebloods – was very slim and provided another level of security.

/Scene Break/

Hermione and Harry rushed to get ready and headed down for breakfast. They had tried to keep their minds blank during the intervening time since their initial discussion but were quickly discovering that telepathy – even when only shared with one other person – was more of a curse than a blessing. In order to save the sanity of the other, each had agreed to try and think about things that would not adversely affect the other. It worked to a point but it was very tiring. Hermione nearly gagged as she read Harry's thoughts about checking his toes for fungus before he put on his socks and, in a very similar manner, Harry did not want to know what certain depilatories were for.

It was a very agitated couple that ran into the dining area and spotted Tom and Severus having a discussion with Luna and Narcissa. They were just sharing a laugh over the announcement Harry had put in the paper regarding Narcissa's marriage. Narcissa was just telling them that Stage 2 should be getting underway.

They all looked up as Harry and Hermione started speaking in a very peculiar – yet very familiar – manner.

Harry was out of breath and starting to get a bit anxious, "Hi everyone. We need your help."

"Harry and I," Hermione started saying.

"Well, we performed the bonding ritual," continued Harry.

"Last night. This morning"

"When we woke up,"

"We discovered a major"

"Side effect. You see"

"We can read each other's"

"Active thoughts and its"

"Driving us nuts."

"We figure we need"

"To learn Occlumency and"

"Get the Horcrux"

"Out of Harry"

"As soon as possible," they said in unison and their heads snapped around to stare at each other.

"Listen to us," Harry started.

"We're talking like," replied Hermione.

"The Bloody Twins!" Once more they finished in unison.

They were interrupted by laughter from around the table. Luna had her head face down in her arms on the table and was visibly shaking with laughter. Tom was chuckling and Severus was laughing so hard he fell off his chair. Narcissa had managed to remain calm until Severus hit the floor. Then she lost it as well.

Hermione and Harry just gawked at the four having breakfast. They waited until they had calmed down and Severus had reseated himself and then Bill came in with Fleur and Arthur. Arthur looked around perplexed. He said, "I was sure I heard the Twins in here a minute ago."

This set off another round of laughter followed by a third round once Luna could explain the situation to Arthur, Bill and Fleur.

/Scene Break/

Molly and her two youngest went to the Family Records Division of the Ministry. While Ron and Ginny waited in the lobby, Molly went and spoke with one of the clerks.

The clerk looked up the appropriate records and confirmed that Arthur had been there not twenty minutes before and had indeed disowned Ronald Bilius and Ginevra Molly. He gave Molly the forms she requested and immediately after she completed them he reviewed them and stamped the papers as approved.

Molly went back out to her children. "Well, it's all official now. It's strange, Albus was supposed to meet us here."

A small crack and Albus appeared. He looked very weary. He looked at Molly and asked, "Is everything completed?" Molly nodded s he turned t Ron, "Please floo to my office once you are packed."

Ron nodded dumbly wondering what this was all about when he heard a voice he didn't think he would ever hear at the Ministry again – Bellatrix.

"Oh, Headmaster. Why do you keep running away? Don't you want to play Headmaster and naughty schoolgirl? If you are good, I'll even let you play 'Headmaster' this time."

As the images from this statement invaded Ron's brain, Albus disappeared again quickly followed by Bella. Aurors rushed in moments later but they realized they were too late.

"Mum, what did the Headmaster mean about me being packed and seeing him?"

"I'll explain it all once we get back to the Burrow Ronald. I talked to the Headmaster yesterday and he wants you for something he's planning."

"OK," Ron said with a smile. He was getting his first solo assignment for Dumbledore. He knew becoming a Prewitt would be good for him.

Molly sighed. At least she now knew just how to tell Ron he was no longer part of any family.

/Scene Break/

The people around the table were finally starting to compose themselves. During this whole time Harry and Hermione just stood and stared at their friends. The looks on their faces did not help to quell the laughter.

"This isn't funny!" She tried to say it calmly but it came a bit louder than she expected. "We need"

"Your, humph." Hermione's arm shot out quickly and her hand clamped over his mouth silencing him.

"What my dear boyfriend and I want to say is that we need your help," she continued with an enforced calm.

Severus was wiping the tears from his eyes, "So," he started trying to fight down more laughter, "we can assume the bonding worked?"

Hermione still try to keep and enforced calm, "Yes. It worked a little too well. I have half a mind to write Teen Witch Weekly and let them know that speaking to a bonded in your mind is more of a curse than ... HARRY POTTER, you will NOT be LICKING my HAND to get it off your MOUTH."

The table erupted in laughter once more.

/Scene Break/

Albus got back to his office exhausted and it wasn't even ten o'clock yet. He needed to find out how Bellatrix was tracking him. So far the only thing he knew was that she could not follow him to Hogwarts. Everywhere he went outside school grounds she would show up within minutes. He had Alastor, Minerva and Filius cast revealing charms on him, but there were no tracking spells found.

He calmed himself down with a Lemon Drop and thought about the situation. While it was true that he was still a very powerful wizard and could easily take Bellatrix down, the other Death Eaters could be a problem. His age was starting to catch up with him and while he felt he probably had another good sixty to seventy years left in him, dueling multiple opponents alone might be a stretch. He didn't know this for sure, but he had a reputation to protect and if he tried to take Bellatrix and her companions by himself there were so many things that could go wrong that could permanently tarnish his image. That was the last thing he needed right now.

The duel a few weeks ago with Tom had tired him and Albus knew they were dueling to a standstill. However Albus also suspected that he would not have lasted any more than another five minutes or so against Tom. Tom's possession of Harry was a lucky break for Albus since it weakened Tom to the point that he had to break off the fight and allowed Albus to keep his image as the only one the Dark Lord feared.

No, what he needed to take care of Bellatrix was to lure her into a trap. He would talk to Alastor about this later.

The first order of business was to take care of Ronald Bilius NoName. He went over to his fireplace to make a call.

/Scene Break/

The laughter had died down once more. In his mind Harry told Hermione he had something to ask Tom. She took her – thankfully dry – hand from his mouth and he looked over at Tom. She willed herself to keep quiet even as she saw the words forming in Harry's brain and felt the urge to speak.

"Tom," Harry was trying to also maintain a level tone, "we have a connection through the Horcrux. It used to only open when one of us was experiencing strong feeling but we both eventually learned to control it. Do you have any idea why that one was a closed connection until we opened it, but the connection I have with Hermione is wide open?"

Tom thought for a minute and then believed he had the answer, “Harry, the Horcrux in you is more like a parasite attached to your soul whereas your voluntary bonding with Hermione had the effect of your two souls overlaying each other in a more complete connection. I think Severus and I should begin to teach you Occlumency – the correct way mind you – to help you organize and shield your minds. However that will only go so far.”

Hermione spoke up, “What do we do then?”

Luna answered, “Based on the few first-hand experiences I read about in the library, I think I can answer that. Regardless of the strength of the bond, you two need to take the time to explore its limits. Talk to each other in your heads and take the other for a ‘tour’ of your mind. Explore the connections; see how they can be manipulated and set ground rules between the two of you. It’s new right now and like any new ability you have to learn how to control it. Remember, there is a good chance that if it is not permanent now, the ritual to remove the Horcrux could make it permanent.”

Harry and Hermione both nodded together and sat down to breakfast. The atmosphere had calmed down quite a bit with Luna’s matter-of-fact explanation. Harry and Hermione did not say much during breakfast – they were trying to keep out of the other’s mind as much as possible until they could spend some time alone and map out the dos and don’ts of their bond.

They had arranged with Tom to do the ritual tonight. When Tom asked if they were sure they looked at each other and nodded. Both wanted the Horcrux out of Harry sooner rather than later.

/Scene Break/

Molly arrived back at the Burrow with Ron and Ginny. Ginny went to make some tea as Ron and Molly went up to his room.

“Now Ronald,” Molly began explaining, “Albus has some very interesting plans for you this summer.”

Ron looked at her with a furrowed brow and asked, "What plans Mum? Does it have to do with getting back at Potter?"

"I don't want to spoil the surprise," Molly told him cheerfully. In her mind she was thinking, "and I really don't care at this point."

"I got you a present Ron – a new trunk!"

"Thanks Mum. You know, I think that being Prewitts will be good for us."

Molly coughed, "Yes. Well, er, the trunk is one of those ones that are charmed inside to be very big and it has a feather light charm. You know how when you go to school you always for get something?"

"Uh huh."

"Well with this one you can pack everything you own – or so I was told. In fact, why don't you pack now and see if you can get all you belongings into this trunk?"

"Sure Mum that will be cool."

"You can then take it with you since Albus agreed you may not be back here for a while."

"OK, Mum." Ron was really happy. He was now the oldest child in the family and they were better off financially than when they were Weasleys. And now Dumbledore wanted him for something special. "Maybe he wants me to spy on Potter or better still he's going to give me extra training," he thought. It was with these uplifting thoughts that the unsuspecting Ronald NoName was packing his trunk on his last day at the Burrow.

Once he was done he came downstairs and found his mother and sister in the kitchen talking. They stopped as soon as he came in and both turned to him smiling.

"All packed?" Ginny asked him.

“Yup.”

She came over and gave him a brief sisterly hug. He looked at her strangely, “What’s that all about?”

“Oh, not knowing Dumbledore’s plans for you, I may not see you for a while so I thought I’d give my brother one last hug,” Ginny said. If Narcissa had been there at that moment she would have noted that Ginny had the whole ‘fake sincerity’ tenet down pat.

“Well, come along Ronald,” Molly said adopting her fake motherly voice, “let’s not keep Albus waiting.”

Ron Said goodbye to Ginny, and as soon as he walked out the door she started doing her ‘happy dance’ around the kitchen. She finally had her Mum to herself and now they could really live up to the Prewitt name. Their first target would be Lord Harry James Potter-Black.

/Scene Break/

Molly and Ron arrived in the Headmaster’s office shortly before noon.

“Ronald, I’m very glad to see you. Arrangements have already been made.”

“Um, thanks?”

Albus was used to seeing a lack of comprehension on the boy’s face, but this one was unusual. “Ronald, I take it your mother explained the situation?”

Now it was Molly’s turn to look constipated, “Well Albus, you see ... um ... it was really better this way. I didn’t have any troubles bringing him here. Ronald,” she spoke directly to him and he was still so confused he wore a ‘deer in the headlights’ expression, “you see, I didn’t really adopt you this morning. I’m only adopting Ginny.”

She paused to wait for a reaction – none came. This built up her confidence, “You see Ginny and I spoke about it yesterday and there really is only enough money for the two of us to live in the style we deserve and she really is the smarter one – the one who is more like a Prewitt. That and the Prewitt line is matriarchal so all in all I had to adopt her. You didn’t bring enough to the table.”

“Ron looked like he was about to faint. His warbling voice came out just enough to be audible, “My Mum and sister betrayed me?”

“Oh come on now Ronald, don’t be selfish. I thought that you would be able to go back to your father but you had to go and request him to disown you himself before I even had a chance to.” She glanced at the clock, “Well. Just look at the time. Where has this morning gone? I really should get back to Ginny. There is a lot of work to do when you reactivate a family name. Goodbye Mr. NoName. Have a nice life. Albus, always a pleasure.”

With a burst of green flame, Molly Prewitt was gone through the floo.

Ron was stunned. His ego had just taken another swift kick and was once again down for the count. Ronald NoName. He was Ronald NoName. He was an outcast in pureblood society. He looked a Dumbledore who had that twinkle in his eye.

“Headmaster, I’m not sure what is so amusing. Just this morning I’ve been thrown out of one family by my Dad and denied access to another by my own Mum. Perhaps you can tell me what the hell the twinkle is for?”

Just then the door at the back of the headmasters office opened and a man who was instantly recognizable to Ron came out. “Now Mr. NoName is that any way to talk to your Headmaster?”

Ron looked on wide-eyed, “YOU. What the bloody hell are you doing here?”

The man continued, “Really Ronald, such language in unbecoming of a pureblood. If you would please sit down, the headmaster can fill you

in on what he and I have been discussing this morning and how it pertains to you.”

/Scene Break/

Tonks arrived at Potter Manor shortly after eleven. She walked into the sitting room and Narcissa looked up expectantly, “Well, if it isn’t my favourite niece. How did it go?”

Tonks laughed, “I was at the Ministry today. Your former husband showed up to apply for a business permit. Someone tipped off the Aurors but he managed to get out without being seen.”

Narcissa smiled, “Perfect. I wonder how he managed that,” she said playfully.

Tonks giggled, “you never know.”

/Scene Break/

Back at the compound, Bellatrix was enjoying the memory of Dumbledore’s face this morning. The one thing that bothered her was that Dumbledore never fought back. This bothered her. Every time she goaded him and teased him she was looking for a fight. And yet every time he turned tail and fled.

“What the hell is he thinking?” she said to herself.

One of her team heard her and said, “What if he’s testing us?” He cringed as she looked at him, “Well, there goes my life,” he thought.

Bellatrix looked at him and thought about what he said. “Please go on,” she said slowly.

“Well, you obviously have some way of tracking where he is that he hasn’t been able to figure out. He’s been trying to figure out how you’re doing it. Obviously he hasn’t yet and he wants to know how before he puts a stop to it.”

Bellatrix nodded, “That makes sense.”

"There's more."

"Oh?"

"We need to be careful. Obviously whatever the Dark Lord used is virtually impossible to trace. Dumbledore will eventually get to frustrated to care. If I were he, I'd look to set a trap. We should be ready for one."

"Agreed. We need to be ready from now on to either fight or withdraw immediately," she smiled at the man, "What is your name again?"

"Fudge, Algernon Fudge."

"Interesting name."

"My fourth cousin Cornelius is the Minister of Magic," he said the name as though it made him want to vomit.

"Not a fan of him?"

"He and Dumbledore conspired to kick me out of Hogwarts in my first year. Then they tried to use their international connections to keep me out of any school. I got into Durmstrang under an assumed name and learned everything I could about Dumbledore."

"Well Algernon, you can call me Bella and my new squad leader. I want you to whip these," she gestured to the rest of her team, "into shape. Get them ready to cast or withdraw immediately upon arrival. I also want to know more about our target."

Algernon smiled, "Thank you Bella. I will make sure your team will not fail you."

Bella cackled as he left. Albus wouldn't know what hit him.

/Scene Break/

Amelia looked around the table and smiled. Really watching wizards trying to eat sushi with chopsticks was something that could even inspire a woman her age to experience a fit of giggles. She had taught herself years ago after a friend told her she had to try this style of Japanese food. Tonks and Audrey seemed to have the hang of it but Arthur and Percy were another thing altogether.

They finally had to ask the waitress for the “training” clips that would hold the chopsticks together and allow the two men to enjoy the food.

Once their orders had come, Amelia cast the appropriate spells around the room and started their discussion.

“OK everyone. In order to fight back, we need to weaken their hold on the Ministry without them catching on. Once the four heirs return to Hogwarts and their identity becomes public, we will lose our element of surprise. We have six weeks to try and destabilize something that has taken two centuries to put together.” She paused for effect to let her previous sentence sink in before she continued.

“Now our opponents are some of the most powerful witches and wizards. They have their people in high places in most of wizarding society and the Wizengamot. They even control both sides of the war facing our country.” She had their full attention now.

“However, they have become complacent. Two centuries of having everything go your way will do that. We have the element of surprise. They don’t know that we know what they are up to. We have to be fast, smart and undetected. If we do it right, we can cause them some real problems and destabilize their organization so it can’t easily fight back when the time comes.”

“Now, I asked to meet today not to come up with solutions, but to start by listing our strengths and our connections within the government. From there we can plan our course of action. I would like to have some plans ready by the end of the week. Any questions?”

No one said anything.

“Good,” she said picking up a piece of spicy salmon roll, “Let’s get to know each other a bit better then.”

/Scene Break/

Draco Malfoy was sitting on the sofa re-reading his Potions and Herbology textbooks picking up on the nuances of some of the recipes that he hadn’t before. He was cross-referencing all the potions ingredients with their entries in the Herbology books to get a better idea of why certain plants were used in certain potions. He had come across this epiphany once he realized that Potions and Herbology were two of the only NEWT courses he would be able to take and that he had better do his best in them.

He looked up as the fire flared and his father stepped through. “Where did you go this morning?”

“I’ve been taking measures for your upcoming school year.”

“What do you mean, taking ...” he paused as the fire flared again and another stepped through. Draco’s eyes went wide, “What the hell are you doing here?”

Lucius smiled, “Draco, watch your language around your new brother.”

That was the last thing Draco heard before everything went black.

A/N – My apologies to Love and Rockets. “Haunted when the Minutes Drag” is one of my favourite songs and it just seemed to fit here.

Thanks to everyone who continue to follow this story and leave their reviews.

I would also like to say to AmintaCyprian that I am floored by her request to translate both this story and The Power He Knows Not to Spanish. Thank you for your offer. If you can read Spanish, check them out.

Chapter 27 – How Soon is Now?

Albus watched the fire settle down as Lucius and his new 'son' left. He knew what was planned for the boy but did not really care either way. It was Lucius' problem to find an heir to the Malfoy name not his.

Albus was out of breath. The past few weeks had taken their toll on his 150-year-old physique. It scared him; the tremors going through his body were really bad this time. Albus had been fighting off his gradual decline for some time now – it was only his connection to the Hogwarts wards and the ability to draw energy from him that kept the ravages of time at bay.

"As soon as I get rid of Potter and Riddle, I can reverse this miserable condition," thought Albus as he pulled energy direct from the castle. He frowned; the energy wasn't flowing very well lately. When he first came up with the idea of using the ambient energy of Hogwarts to prolong his life the energy flowed through him like drinking from a fire hose. However in the past five years it had become successively more difficult to the current state where the fire hose had been replaced by a narrow straw which he was trying to drink a thick vanilla milkshake through. He had not had the time to investigate this and the current flow of energy required that he spend more and more time at the castle. "It's almost as if Hogwarts is fighting me."

Albus was very grateful for his ancestors and their work putting together the eventual age of Pureblood supremacy. However as a young man Albus eschewed such selfless devotion to an ideal. He knew it was either going to be himself or his heir who would lead the Purebloods to their rightful place in society. The day he realized this, young Albus decided that he would be the one to lead his people. He began – at first in secret until his father 'went to the next great adventure' – his quest for immortality.

Grindelwald was his first pawn. A few well-placed memory and compulsion charms drove a political couch potato to turn into one of the most feared dark lords in history. Grindelwald tried rituals and potions to extend his life but go nowhere near immortal but Albus learned a lot from his mistakes and found a new pliable subject in the

form of Tom Riddle. That Tom was the Heir of Slytherin just help him accelerate his overall plans.

Dumbledore had watched from afar as Tom created his first horcrux. Tom now had an anchor in the world but Albus planted some clues and used Slughorn to give Tom the idea to make seven.

Everything with the horcruxes seemed to be working to plan until that fateful Halloween in 1981. Yes, Tom was immortal, but being incorporeal was not what Albus had in mind. It was then that he went to his fallback plan.

Dumbledore had managed to go through life without alienating the man he considered his mentor in the fine art of Alchemy. Nicholas had the damn stone secured and any attempt to go for it would no doubt cause the stone and it's owners to disappear faster than a whole chicken in front of Ronald Malfoy. He began to work on the Flamel's paranoia. Subtle hints about Voldemort's obsession with immortality, his incorporeal state, and his ruthlessness mad it into the heads of the Flamels over a period of several years. It culminated in 1991 with 'sightings' of Voldemort – Albus had the Flamels to the point where they asked him to keep the stone safe.

Albus opened a hidden drawer in his desk and pulled out a blood red stone. The smile on his face told the story. The former owners of the stone finally died two years ago. There was no one else save Potter who knew for sure if the stone had ever been at Hogwarts. All the others had either his or Potter's word that they had seen the stone – even Hagrid had only handled a small package and never opened it.

No one would deny the manipulation skills of a certain Headmaster Dumbledore. The public was fickle and he needed to hold off using the Elixir of Life until he was securely installed at the head of the new Pureblood Order. Until then he had to live off the Hogwarts wards. The fight with Voldemort took a lot out of him and he even held back for 15 minutes after sending to Order in so that he could play the Heroic leader.

Since then he had not quite gotten back to normal in it didn't help that Bellatrix was stalking him. He was going to have to spend more time

at Hogwarts fighting with the wards. He patted the stone gently and fought a certain urge to call it 'my precious' as he put it back into his desk.

//Scene Break//

He opened his eyes and found himself staring at the ceiling of his bedroom. "Oh, thank Merlin," he thought to himself, "it must have been a dream." He allowed himself to relax. "That was a weird dream. Must have been all the stress I've been under recently." He rolled his head to the side and immediately wished he hadn't.

"Hay Bro! 'Bout time you woke up."

"Weasel, what the hell are you doing here? I am certainly not your Bro."

Ron had been absentmindedly raiding Draco's chocolate Frog stash he bit into a frog as Draco finished and answered, "Our dad adopted me this morning."

"Why the hell would he do that?"

At this point Lucius walked in with a very familiar if not familial sneer on his face. The look was actually a Malfoy trademark – honed to perfection by Speculum Malfoy to show disdain for anything his father Scorpius had managed to get himself into. It was primarily disdain and disgust delivered with an air of superiority that the one wearing the look was above recipient and said recipient was fortunate to get any reaction at all – Speculum hated everything about his father especially the many things he got into and he never forgave his father for his name. Lucius chided his son, "Now now Draco, try and make your new brother feel comfortable."

"Why is this brain-damaged carrot my brother?"

"Ronald is your brother and I would advise you not insulting him so."

"Why not? His only real skills are eating, chess and an amazing flexibility which allows him to stick both feet into any given orifice."

Ron was oblivious to the insults. These were the best chocolate frogs he had ever eaten and his brain had shut down as his taste buds approached oral orgasm.

If anything, Lucius' smirk became even more pronounced, "Why Draco, you need protection at Hogwarts once word gets out your magic has left you. Some of your peers whose parents are fortunate enough to server the Dark Lord may even know the truth."

Draco paled to the point where his hair appeared to darken, "How is he going to protect me?"

Ron, his face flush as he came down from the taste bud stimulation high, looked offended as he responded, "Hey! I was part of the DA last year and held my own at the Ministry of Magic fighting Dad," Lucius winced at the oh so common term – he preferred Father – as Ron continued, "and his Death Eater buddies. I'm sure I can protect you Draco."

"Forgive me if I'm not feeling all warm and tingly here, but you don't have the best track record of sticking with your friends. How do I know you'll protect me and not rally everyone to finish me off?"

Lucius interrupted, "Draco, Ronald had been disowned by his family ..." he was interrupted as Draco fell out of his be laughing.

"You mean to tell me that you weren't even good enough for your poor blood traitor family? That is just too much."

"DRACO!" Lucius snapped at his squib of a son, "Please do not interrupt. Ronald is now a Malfoy. He has made an oath on his magic before his blood adoption to protect and never betray the Malfoy Family which also includes you."

"You performed a blood adoption? Why? The family laws state that he can't be the heir from a blood adoption."

“Draco, I’m just improving my odds. There’s a loophole in the family laws. If either of you manage to find a bride and have a magical male offspring then he will be the Malfoy heir.”

Draco looked over at Ron who had a blank stare now that he finished the chocolate. He tried to picture Ron’s son as the Malfoy heir and an involuntary shudder went through his body.

Ron noticed where Draco was and helped him off the floor. He looked at his new father and brother, “When’s Lunch?”

Draco and Lucius just looked at each other and slowly shook their heads – the weeks leading up to September would be very long indeed.

//Scene Break//

Harry and Hermione were sitting on Harry’s bed facing each other. Her brown eyes were locked in a fixed stare with his green ones. Controlling the access each had to the other’s mind and thoughts was proving rather difficult. In fact, this staring contest was the result of multiple failed attempts to keep their thoughts hidden from each other. The blank staring contest gave them both the most peace they had all day.

Hermione groaned and broke eye contact. “Harry that works, but we can’t just sit and stare at each other all day every day. How are we going to keep out of each other’s minds?”

Harry closed his eyes and thought about their new bond and everything they had tried to keep the other out. Then it dawned on him – the bond was built on mutual trust and love. There was no way they would ever succeed in pushing the other out since it went against the whole idea of a soul bond. He smiled.

“Hermione, are you thinking what I’m thinking?”

“Of course I am Harry. You know tha...” she broke off as she understood his thought. “Harry, you’re brilliant sometimes. Of course,

we can't force each other out. We should be able to withdraw from the other's mind to respect their privacy."

Ten minutes later they had successfully withdrawn – well, sort of. They could not read the other's thoughts, but could still sense the feelings and emotions emanating from the other.

The two looked into each other's eyes both smiling a goofy grin as the stress of the morning dissipated. Hermione spoke first, "Harry, you are brilliant. Please don't get me wrong – I'm not sorry we bonded last night, I just wasn't prepared with how connected we became. This feeling however is very, very nice." Harry's eyes nearly bugged out. Hermione was almost purring those last few words. She continued, "We need to practice more with the bond we have to see how deep the connection runs. This level of connection gives us a safe place to start and return to when we get overwhelmed."

Harry was still staring at her with wide eyes. His brain had not really processed anything past the 'purring'. Hermione looked into his eyes and felt the rush of emotions over the bond. When their lips met all ideas of intelligent conversation were shelved for the time being.

//Scene Break//

Tom Riddle and Severus Snape were working in their cottage preparing for the horcrux reintegration. Severus noted that the older wizard seemed distracted.

"Tom?"

He looked up at the potions master with an unfocussed look.

"You look distracted. Is there anything bothering you?"

"Is it that obvious?" Severus nodded. Tom sighed. "I keep thinking about the last reintegration and I'm worried about the next one. You see, I had expected to go up the stairs and just take care of Harry. I began the horcrux ritual as I climbed the stairs..."

Severus eyes opened in realization, "So that means..." Tom nodded. "And that's how..." Tom nodded again. "So when the reintegration takes place..."

Tom sighed, "Exactly. It could make these last couple of weeks a spectacular waste of time."

"But if the exorcism works beforehand..."

"The exorcism is a long shot. There's no guarantee it will work. We will most likely have to do the reintegration as is. He'll insist."

"I know."

"If he survives the reintegration he'll probably kill me."

There was nothing more to be said. They finished their preparations and walked back up to the main house.

//Scene Break//

Harry and Hermione had spent the afternoon exploring the bond. Once they had found their 'safe harbour' they started enjoying the feeling of the bond and the various levels they could achieve. Harry thought about how nice the feelings felt and playfully wondered why they hadn't done this earlier.

Hermione felt a change in the bond from Harry. He was starting to pale. She felt him withdraw. "Harry? What's wrong?" He was starting to hyperventilate and would not look at her. She cupped his face in both her hands and lifted it so she could see his eyes. "Harry," she said soothingly, "talk to me. What is going on?"

"I'm sorry." His voice was just above a whisper.

"Sorry? For what?"

"For pulling you into this. You see I was enjoying exploring this new part of our relationship and I just wished we had shared this before." Hermione smiled at him warmly as he continued, "then I realized why

we have the bond to begin with. Hermione, I love you and now because of me, I've put you in danger. I'm scared Hermione. I'm not scared of dying. I'm scared of you dying."

Hermione pulled him into a hug. "Harry, I feel the same way. Can I tell you something?" She felt him nod against her neck. "I'm just as afraid of losing you. But we're doing this together. Harry, I agreed to do this because I know we can get through this together. "

"But ..."

"Harry Potter you are not allowed to be noble right now. I'm just as happy as you are with the bond we share right now. I thought I knew what I was getting into but I was mistaken."

He pulled back and looked at her as she continued, "It's way better than I thought it would be. We'll get through this together." They hugged again.

Harry pulled back again, "Are you sure?"

She nodded.

"So am I. Let's get this over with."

They shared a brief heartfelt kiss and headed downstairs where they found a somber Tom and Severus. They looked at Harry who announced, "We're ready. Let's do it before any of us change our mind."

Harry called Jeeves and gave him instructions to get the people together who needed to be there and inform the rest of what was going on. The group of four headed down the path together.

//Scene Break//

Charlie Weasley had just finished his lunch and was on his way back out to check on Norbert. The young Dragon his friends had transported from Hogwarts had grown quickly and was almost ready

to be let out on his own into the preserve. He was startled from his thoughts by a non-descript brown owl landing in front of him.

He took the letter from its leg and thanked it. As the owl flew off, Charlie unrolled the scroll and read the few lines written on it. His jaw dropped and he read the letter again.

Within an hour he had arranged for a leave of absence and was on his way to Bucharest to arrange for an international portkey to take him back to England.

His family needed him.

//Scene Break//

Hermione's parents met up with them at the cottage. They both hugged Hermione and Harry and saw the worry in both the teens' eyes. It was difficult for them to accept the possibilities of what was going to happen but at the same time they were enormously proud of their daughter and the woman she was becoming. They would be standing vigil in the cottage tonight with others, but it was felt to be too dangerous for them to observe the procedure directly – there were too many possible complications and being muggles they would be hard pressed to defend themselves.

They sat down in the main room and the elves brought them some tea. During the next hour they managed to pass the time with small talk and constantly glanced at the stairwell. They were disconcerted by the lack of noise coming from upstairs although Severus had told them that he would be casting silencing spells.

They were interrupted by the sound of Severus coming down the stairs. He came over to them and shook his head slowly. "The exorcism was not successful. The soul fragment has been in Harry's head so long that we can not cast it out."

Jane asked, "So what does this mean?"

"It means that we will have to try the horcrux reintegration before the fragment is removed from Harry. Your daughter will need to help him

anchor his own soul as the fragment heeds the call of its master. Both Harry and your daughter are at risk here. As you are no doubt aware, this has never been tried before as far as we can tell.”

Dan spoke up, “Are you sure this is wise? Shouldn’t you postponed this and try to find some other way?”

“Both Harry and Hermione have asked us to continue. They are readying themselves mentally for this and wanted me to come down and keep you apprised of the situation. I would recommend you make yourself comfortable, this may take several hours. I will remain in attendance and assist if I am capable.”

“Thank you Severus,” said Jane, “please take good care of them.”

Severus nodded and went back upstairs.

//Scene Break//

There were two beds in the room. Tom was sitting on one and Harry and Hermione were lying on the other holding hands. They were working on opening their bond as far as they could and maintaining physical contact. Harry turned to look at her, “Are you sure you want to do this?”

She smiled at him, “Yes. Now stop asking. You’ve asked me a hundred times now. I think we are prepared. I’m ready to do this. Don’t worry Mr. Potter – I’ve got your soul covered.”

He leaned over and kissed her and then lay back down. He tightened his grip on Hermione’s hand. “Severus,” he began, “please do whatever you can to make sure Hermione’s OK.”

Severus came over to the pair, “I will be here the entire time. I won’t let harm come to any of you if I can prevent it.”

Harry nodded once. “OK, Tom. It’s your show now.”

Tom drank the potion and said the incantation. Harry and Hermione’s eyes shut and their bodies stiffened. A dark silvery mist appeared to

leach out of Harry's scar and slowly coalesced into a very small cumulonimbus cloud. Once the last of the fragment had left the scar it pulled an almost white tendril out of Harry's scar and another one coming out of Hermione's forehead attached itself to the white tendril just below the fragment. The dark silver cloud shot forward dragging the other tendrils with it and it slammed into Tom's head. For a split second there was silence and then three heart-rending screams filled the air.

//Scene Break//

Throughout the evening members of the OE had been arriving to sit and wait with Dan and Jane. The look of worry on their pale faces answered everyone's first question as they came through the door. Neville and Luna sat close to Dan and Jane and talked quietly with him. Remus and Tonks sat over to the side with Andromeda and Narcissa. Wanting to be productive, Augusta and Xeno politely refused the elves' help and were making coffee and tea and a light snack in the kitchen. In their own way, all of them were trying not to consciously dwell on what was going on over their heads.

//Scene Break//

Harry's eyes opened. He looked around and saw he was standing in front of a door holding Hermione's hand. He looked at his girlfriend and she swung her head around to look at him. "Where are we?" she asked. "This doesn't look familiar to me."

Harry thought for a moment, "We may be in the horcrux. It must still be attached somehow." He moved to open the door and Hermione's grip tightened.

"Harry, I have a bad feeling about this. Let's just go. I think I know the way out."

Harry paused. He thought for a moment and said, "Hermione, he created this horcrux firing a killing curse at me. That may be my room on the other side. I just want to see it once. What bad can happen from that?"

“Do you want a list?”

“I figured you would have one.” Harry opened the door and walked through.

The two teens took three steps into the room and stopped dead in their tracks.

//Scene Break//

Lucius Malfoy Warily opened the evening edition of the Daily Prophet. The past few days had held a number of surprises for the Malfoy head. He quickly scanned the News and Society sections and, not seeing his name anywhere, sat in his favourite chair to read the paper. When he got to the business section he choked.

Ministry Notice Number 1995-1769

Business License Application Notice

Pursuant to article 6669 subsection 42 paragraph 3 of the Hereditary Business Act of 1283, the Business Permit Office of the Ministry of Magic has received an application by Lord Lucius Malfoy for the reinstatement a license for an Animal Husbandry business. Said license would cover the exclusive rights in Magical Britain to breed magical bloodlines for domesticated herd animals for the following species:

Magical Guernsey Cattle

Magical Jersey Cattle

Magical Sheep

Magical Swine

Magical Goats

Crumple Horned Snorkacks

Erumpents

Magical Wolverines

The Ministry will post this notice in the Daily Prophet for a period of 10 days. Within this time period the Ministry will accept challenges to this license application. Any parties wishing to challenge this application must file the appropriate paperwork with the Ministry of Magic Business Permit Office referencing notice number 1995-1769.

Before the paper hit the floor, Lucius was kneeling in front of the fireplace calling out, "Albus Dumbledore!"

//Scene Break//

"Mum?"

Hermione wondered how one three-letter word from her boyfriend could convey such a range of emotion. In that one short word he heard shock, hope, sadness, and a bit of happiness. She looked at the woman sitting on the chair next to the crib. "There's no mistaking the eyes," she thought, "that's Lily Potter."

Harry was rooted to the spot. Sure, part of his brain knew that this was not the real world, but he could not recall anything about his mother other than the images he saw when faced with Dementors. Now, there she was sitting beside a crib. His eyes moved slowly over her face and he tried to take in every last detail. Her hair was gorgeous – calling her a redhead just didn't do it justice. Her eyes were truly like his. Looking into them he could understand what Hermione meant about staring into his – he could not break contact with them.

He stood transfixed. Everything seemed to be moving in slow motion. His mother turned to face him and seemed to study him just as intently as he did her. He saw a sudden look of realization in her eyes as her face broke into one of the most beautiful smiles he had ever seen.

"Harry?"

Tears started to run down his face as he found he was too choked up to speak. He just nodded. Lily got up and wrapped her son in a big hug as tears streamed down her face as well.

Hermione felt a tug on her back as Harry let go of her hand to return his mother's hug. She quickly figured out what it was and snaked two fingers through one of his belt loops before she got pulled away.

Harry stood relishing the hug he had wished for over the course of the past 14 years. He felt that something missing was once again there. The hug and the warm, comforting feeling of being held by his mother made him realize that he had been missing the true, unconditional love that only a parent could give their child.

All the walls he had built over his incarceration with the Dursleys came down in that instant. Something in him realized that this was his Mum – she would love him regardless of anything he did or said. Part of him knew Hermione loved him in a similar way, but this was his Mum. All of his pent up emotions – all of the hurt, loneliness, fear, anger – were released as he clung on to his mother for fear that she would let go. His entire body shook as he let her soothe him and hold him. She just whispered into his ear and held him tight as he let everything out.

Hermione watched as her soul mate took comfort in his mother's arms. While she intellectually knew where she was, she also knew that, right now to Harry, this would be very very real. She looked up and caught Lily looking at her. A brief silent conversation ensued and ended with Lily breaking part of the hug and inviting Hermione into it.

After what seemed like hours the three broke apart – Hermione making sure that she always maintained some sort of physical contact with Harry. Lily led them over to a small sofa that James had put in Harry's room. The three of them sat down with Harry in the middle.

Harry asked the first question that came to his mind, "Are you really my Mum?"

Lily thought before she answered, "Yes and no. Before you arrived I was talking to Tom here," she gestured over to the other side of the room and Hermione and Harry saw Tom standing there for the first time, "and he explained that this is a horcrux. What he was able to piece together from his last reintegration is that the part of the ritual traps a fragment of not just the caster's soul but also the victim provided in the sacrifice."

Tom spoke up, "The incantation is slightly different based on whether you intend for one victim or multiple victims for the sacrifice. When I was climbing the stairs to this room on that night, I said the incantation for a single victim since I only had one in mind. So after I killed your mother, the spell I cast on you was supposed to really be cast on the deck of cards but I made a mistake. That's why the curse backfired since it contained the soul fragment, it could not destroy the host and so it rebounded back on me."

Harry turned back to his Mum. "So that means that you are what exactly?"

"I'm a small piece of Lily's soul – not big enough to prevent her death, but enough to hold the Horcrux together. I do have all my memories up to the moment the curse hit me. Before we go on son, could you please tell me who this pretty young lady is beside you?"

Harry smiled – she called him son – before what she said clicked in place, "Oh, sorry. Mum this is Hermione Granger. She's been my best friend for five years now and my girlfriend for the past two weeks. We ... we have a soul bond and that is why she is here."

"Well," said Lily, "I'm glad you made such an excellent choice in a friend and girlfriend." She sighed. They didn't have much time but they all could see that Harry was oblivious to that. "Tell me about yourself son."

//Scene Break//

Hedwig had delivered the Daily Prophet to the group in the cottage. When they saw the notice everyone looked around and saw the evil grins on Narcissa and Tonks' faces. Neville smirked, "Round 2?"

Narcissa grinned evilly and nodded.

Neville continued, "But how did this get filed? Don't you have to file in person?"

Tonks spoke up, "You do." With that she morphed and Lucius Malfoy was suddenly sitting with his arms around Remus. Everyone laughed even harder when Remus shrieked and jumped up. He had just been about to kiss Tonks.

Luna was puzzled, "How is he going to breed Snorkacks?"

Narcissa answered, "We weren't sure. However the next time you and your father want to write about them you can always refer to this notice."

The smile on Luna and Xeno's faces created more laughter around the table. Luna spoke up, "Narcissa, how far would you like to go with this?" She said this with what was quickly becoming known as her 'evil' grin.

"Why, what do you have in mind?"

"Well, first we'll need Tonk's help again."

She explained her plan and got very enthusiastic nods from Narcissa and Tonks.

The playful banter helped cut the stressful atmosphere that had settled over the room while they worried about what was going on in the bedroom above them.

//Scene Break//

The scream had let up slightly – something Severus was most grateful for. He was worried though. The tendrils linking to Tom's head from Hermione and Harry's heads were getting stronger. It was not a rapid growth but a growth just the same.

“Not good.” he muttered, “Just what is going on in there?”

//Scene Break//

Harry, with input eventually from Tom and Hermione, had caught Lily up to date with what had happened since that Halloween. Lily had provided comfort to her son as she heard about everything he had to go through in his life courtesy of one Albus Dumbledore. At the end of the conversation Lily had volunteered some more information about the Conspiracy that Sirius and her had uncovered shortly before she died. She even gave them her ideas of what the ‘powers of the Lady’ were.

Harry had felt better than he could ever remember. It was like a weight had been lifted off his chest and he was able to really breathe for the first time in his life. He was in between his Mum and the woman he loved. It was a dream come true. Unfortunately for Harry the whole experience of seeing his mother, talking to her and holding her had blinded him to the fact of where he really was.

“Mum, just wait till you meet the rest of my friends. We ...” he stopped as he saw the look of concern on his mother’s face. “What’s wrong?”

Lily reached out and cupped her son’s face, “Harry, I can’t come with you. When the Horcrux is reintegrated I will be released and be able to join up with the rest of me.”

“But ...” then the reality hit Harry. He would have to leave his mother again. He would only just have memories of her hugs. This conversation was going to be the only one he would ever have with either of his parents.

“Harry. You will have to go soon. Remember that I love you and I know you will be successful in your life. Promise me that you will hang on to that wonderful woman beside you. The two of you seem perfect for each other.”

“It sounds like you are sending me away.” Tears were starting to fall from Harry’s eyes. He grabbed on to his Mum. “I’m not leaving without you.”

"Harry, you have no choice. If you stay all three of you could die. My fate has already been determined. It was set on October 31, 1981. You still have a long way to go." She kissed him on the forehead, "It's time son."

"Nooooo. I don't want to leave you again." Harry was getting desperate. Hermione was having a hard time hanging on.

Tom was silent as he watched the scene in front of him play out. He had been trying to remain emotionless the entire time to provide his new friend with the chance to spend time with his mother. Now as he watched Harry's heart breaking once again his emotions began to rise. He knew that he could not hold back much longer. "Harry, Lily," he began to say, "I'm sorry." Tears began to stream down his face, "I'm sorry for the monster I became. I'm sorry for being so weak minded that the meddling fool was able to set me on this path. I'm sorry I sunk so far that I got a perverse pleasure out of attacking young families. I regret I ever picked up a wand...." With that the pain inside of Tom increased and he screamed in anger and anguish as the room started to tear itself apart.

Hermione was trying to pull Harry toward the door but he was fighting her.

"NO! Mum, please!"

Lily quickly hugged her son one last time and kissed his forehead, "Harry you need to go with Hermione now. It's too dangerous for both of you to stay. Just don't forget that I love you more than anything. I'll be watching you and you had better give me some grandkids to look over." She smiled warmly as she added, "just not too soon OK."

"I love you mum."

"I love you too son. Now go."

Harry reluctantly allowed Hermione to back him slowly out of the disintegrating room. He paused at the door and gave one small wave to his Mum and saw her wave back just as the room completely

vanished in a ball of bright white light. Harry felt one last tug on his back and then he and Hermione were falling through the darkness. Finally he felt nothing anymore as the blackness overwhelmed him and he lost consciousness.

//Scene Break//

Severus had been watching the links get stronger as the night progressed and he was worried that the souls of Harry and Hermione may be too strongly connected to the horcrux.

Suddenly Tom began to scream louder and after a moment where the links appeared to be strengthening, they started to retract back toward the two teens. After a very long ten minutes where Severus had to consciously remember to breathe the tendrils finally separated from Tom's forehead and snapped back to their owners. Tom was still screaming loudly but Hermione and Harry seemed to relax. Severus checked them over with a few diagnostic spells and found that they were only suffering from exhaustion – albeit mental, physical and magical. All they really needed right now was some rest. It took Tom another few hours to calm down as his soul fragment reintegrated with the rest of him. At three am Severus was finally able to go downstairs and tell an expectant room that the three of them appeared to be physically OK. They would have to wait until they regained consciousness in the morning before anyone would know how the experience affected them psychologically.

//Scene Break//

Algernon Fudge woke up his squad at 5:30 in the morning. He ran them through the same paces he did yesterday. Including the new portkey and apparation formations.

Algernon was smart enough to know that most Pureblood Death Eaters would arrive unarmed at a battle of wits so he purposefully kept the exercises uncomplicated and repetitious. Bella had instructed him that she wanted to see improvement as early as this morning. He was smart enough to know that you don't fail to do what Bellatrix Lestrange tells you to do.

//Scene Break//

Hermione woke up slowly her body was stiff and her throat felt like she had scraped it with coarse sandpaper and then drank some iodine. She managed to look around a bit and saw a haggard Severus approach her.

“Don’t try to talk yet Hermione. Drink this potion first. It will soothe and repair your throat and vocal cords. The other potion is for the pain you are probably feeling.” He helped her drink both.

She immediately felt better and then realized where she was. She looked over at Harry thankful not to see the smoking pile of ash that had been the fate of the first horcrux vessel.

“How is Harry?” she whispered.

“Physically he is fine. The rest we won’t know until he wakes up. Can you feel him through your bond?”

“Not entirely. But then we haven’t experimented with the bond when one of us was asleep.”

Severus nodded in understanding. “Perhaps he will awaken soon.”

“How is Tom?” Hermione asked. Her voice was quickly regaining its full functionality.

“He is the same. Tell me if you are able, what went on? For a while it appeared that your souls were being drawn into Tom with the horcrux.”

“Well,” she began but was interrupted as Harry woke up. She helped feed him the potions.

“Are you OK?” he asked when he saw her.

“Still a bit sore. Are you alright?” she asked as she bent down and kissed him.

“Physically I think I will be. Emotionally, I’m not sure.”

Both of them managed to sit up in the bed.

When Harry saw Tom he got angrier than Hermione had ever experienced from him.

“Look at him the murdering prick. He’s lying there peacefully and good people like my Mum met their end by his wand. I need to get out of here. Jeeves!”

The head elf appeared.

“Please take me to my room.” Harry and Jeeves disappeared.

Hermione was stunned by the viciousness of Harry’s words. She looked at Severus.

He asked, “Was Lily there?” When Hermione nodded he continued, “Tom and I were afraid of that and Harry’s possible reaction. You see, not remembering his parents allowed him to make their deaths and abstract thing in his mind. Now after what I assume is meeting his mother, it is fresh in his mind as though it happened yesterday. He has to learn how to reconcile that and the fact that Tom is no longer the same man who murdered his parents. I think you should go to him and not leave him alone for very long.”

Hermione absorbed what Severus said and called for Jeeves. He appeared immediately. Hermione asked, “Can you take me to Harry’s room?”

“I can Miss. You are the only one he will allow right now.”

She took the elf’s hand and they disappeared.

Severus just took a deep breath and sighed. Everything rested on the four heirs of the founders working together.

A/N – Well, it has been a long time in coming but here is chapter 27. Sorry for the long delay, but life got in the way. I considered a couple of times to post notes, but I don't like posting anything that is not actually part of the story. From a reader's point of view there is nothing as disheartening to invest time into a story and then have it end with an Author's note. That's why Chapter 24 worked so well. ;-)

This chapter took a long time for me to write because of the interaction between Harry and Lily during the reintegration and his feelings afterward. Still not sure if I am happy with it, but at some point as an author you have to stop beating your head against the wall and just put it out there. Let me know what you think about how I finally wrote it.

Hopefully now updates for both my sotries will be a bit more frequent. But with fanfiction posting the story is much more fulfilling than saying you'll post it.

Addendum – After so many months I finally finish this chapter and fanfiction has a problem with posting today. How ironic is that?

Chapter 28 – Dr. Hedwig is On-Call

Hedwig woke up with a start. She had returned to her spot in the owlry about two hours ago and was enjoying her morning sleep until she felt her familiar's anguish. She immediately set off to find him.

//Scene Break//

Harry returned back to his room and sat on the edge of the bed. He was running on pure adrenaline that caused his emotions to be all over the place. One of his biggest dreams had just come true – he had met and talked to his Mother. He had even hugged and kissed her. And, for the first time in his life that he could remember, he finally felt the unconditional love that only a parent could give their child. It was one of the happiest moments in his life.

And then – just as suddenly – it was gone.

She was gone again.

And he would never get another chance to be with her again.

He shook his head fighting back the tears. He knew how to handle tears – he used his anger instead. It just so happened he had a focus for his anger – Tom. He took his parents away from him. He made the decision to kill his mother as she tried to protect her son.

He hated Tom Riddle and his alter ego Voldemort.

The anger clouded his thoughts and successfully kept his rational mind from taking control of the situation.

As he sat stewing in his thoughts a fluttering noise interrupted him and he saw Hedwig fly in and settle on the bedside table next to him. He crossed his legs and slid up on the bed and faced his familiar.

At the same time, Hermione appeared behind him. She was about to speak when she saw Hedwig looking at her. Brown eyes met gold and in an instant Hermione understood – Hedwig needed to deal with

Harry first. She made sure that she remained withdrawn from his mind until Hedwig finished her piece.

//Scene Break//

Albus woke up this morning feeling more fatigued. For some reason it was even harder to draw power from the school today than even yesterday. He looked at the walls around his room and said softly, “you can try and fight me but once the Slytherin and Gryffindor lines are gone for good I will be able to get through your protective wards and bend you to my will. So you might as well stop fighting me.”

He had studied Hogwarts and its wards for years. He knew the founders had imbued her with a semi-sentient mind. They wanted the Castle to “learn” and improve itself as time went on in order to better meet the needs of the students. Each of the four had cast strong protective wards around the “heart” of the castle where the main rune-covered ward stones were placed. The only ones who could enter the heart were the bloodline heirs of the founders.

Albus had tried to breach the wards over the years but found that a millennium had allowed the castle to improve them. His current hypothesis was that the wards would only remain active as long as there were magical heirs. He took it upon himself to trace the bloodlines and find those heirs.

Ravenclaw’s magical line disappeared in the 1300s. There was never record of magical descendants of Ravenclaw after that.

He had tracked down a descendent of Hufflepuff several years ago. After a few subtle suggestions to Tom, that magical bloodline was gone and a new Horcrux was created.

Albus and the Dumbledores who came before him had participated in a magically declared and sworn – but not publicly announced – blood feud with the Potter family for the past six centuries. In 1403 Horatio Potter found – using a very clever investigative technique – that Donald Dumbledore had indeed murdered Morpheus Gaunt the scion of the Gaunt family who were the last remaining family of the Slytherin bloodline. For his crime against pureblood nobility Donald

was sentenced to be partially obliviated, charmed to be featherlite and thrown to the muggles in a small village in tattered wizarding clothing, a carrot crudely tied to the end of his nose, and his magic bound. He survived about two days before he was burnt at the stake after the muggle lord of the area stopped them from trying to drown him. The muggles of the small village had proven to themselves he was a Wizard using the simple fact that he weighed the same as a duck.

Donald's son Dexter never forgave Horatio for what happened to his father. He did a number of things that made him one of the most annotated characters in the Dumbledore family grimoire.

First, he developed a potion that he used to infect the Gaunts. Displaying the Dumbledore trait of extracting vengeance over time when your victim wasn't expecting it, he developed a potion he used to taint the water at Gaunt properties. This potion was specifically formulated to only affect Gaunts as a safeguard when the Dumbledores moved in to claim properties later. It subtly affected the genetics and preferences of the Gaunt family to the point where the Family motto changed to *Reservo Matrimonium in Familia* – Keep Marriage in the Family.

Secondly, Dexter swore a blood feud against the Potters. Mind you he never actually stood up to Horatio to swear the feud in front of him. No, that was something he deemed – coincidentally for the Greater Good of the Dumbledore family – the Potters didn't need to know. This set the systematic depletion of the Potter line under officially mysterious circumstances. All that was left now was Harry James Potter.

The third thing Dexter was famous for is wresting the exclusive rights to breed magical goats in Great Britain from Scorpius Malfoy in 1431.

The fourth claim to familial fame enjoyed by Dexter was that he set the gears in motion for what would eventually become the Pureblood Conspiracy.

Albus shook his head to escape his reverie. He only had the grimoire to go by, but he was convinced that Dexter would be quietly overjoyed to see some of his plans finally nearing fruition.

//Scene Break//

When Charlie arrived back in England at the International portkey site and owl was waiting for him. He took the note and read it. A frown appeared on his brow.

"I can't believe they did that. We're supposed to be family." He set off to find out what was going on. Coming to the apparition point he turned and disappeared with a 'crack'.

//Scene Break//

At the Ministry of Magic business permit office a certain clerk had just served her second important and famous wizard in the same number of days. The wizard today had filed an objection to the permit application filed yesterday by Lord Malfoy. The normally stoic civil servant reflected that if her department achieved any higher visibility that she would ask for a raise.

//Scene Break//

Severus made sure Tom was resting and went downstairs to let those who stayed the night know how things turned out.

As he approached the bottom of the stairs he saw that only Jane and Dan had stayed through the evening.

"How are they?" asked Jane as she saw the exhausted potions master come into the sitting room.

"Hermione and Harry have both awoken and appear unharmed. Tom is still unconscious but I expect he will be all right as well. It takes a certain amount of time for the soul fragment to reintegrate itself."

Hermione's parents looked relieved but Dan noticed something, "Severus, there is something you haven't mentioned yet."

Snape sighed, "Harry was not very happy with Tom when he awoke. In fact he threatened to kill him."

Jane and Dan were shocked and gasped. Jane asked, "Why? They seemed to be getting along well. Don't they have to work together?"

"They do need to work together – all four of them in order to thwart Dumbledore's plans. As to why, may I ask if you viewed the memory of the first reintegration?" Snape asked.

Dan and Jane nodded and Severus continued, "Well based on the brief conversation I had with your daughter a similar event occurred. However this time because Harry was the horcrux and he is soul-bonded with your daughter they were not just spectators but participants in the reintegration."

"What does that mean?" asked Jane.

Severus sighed, "It means that not just Tom, but Harry and Hermione were able to interact with the sacrificial victim the same way Tom was able to interact with his father and grandparents before." He paused to see if the Grangers would work it out for themselves.

Proving that Hermione's intelligence was not a genetic aberration, it took less than ten seconds for their faces to show that they had indeed made the intuitive leap followed by a look of shock as they began to understand the implications. "You mean," Dan said slowly watching the other man's reaction to see if he was on the right track, "Tom, Harry and Hermione met Harry's parents?"

Severus nodded, "Yes, but it was only Lily. Tom began the horcrux ritual after he killed James." He went on to explain the theory or what happened next that he had discussed with Tom the day before.

Jane then continued from where her husband left off, "So Harry was able to interact with his mother?"

Another nod.

“And he’s upset with Tom because it’s like he lost her all over again,” she stated followed by another nod from Severus.

She continued, “That poor boy. Where are Harry and Hermione now?”

Severus sighed, “Harry called Jeeves to take him straight back to his room in the manor. As I said, he was extremely angry. Hermione called Jeeves back and ascertained that she was the only one Harry had not forbidden the elves to allow into his room so she left to go talk to him a few minutes after he left.”

Dan slowly shook his head, “This whole thing can’t fall apart now. If I know my daughter, she’ll talk some sense into him.”

Severus nodded, “For all our sakes I hope you are correct.”

//Scene Break//

Tom opened his eyes and allowed them to focus on the ceiling above him. He took stock of his senses and decided he felt ... better, more whole. His throat was extremely sore and so were his muscles but he had expected that following the last time. He turned his head to look at the other two beds in the room just as Severus came back into the room. The beds, he noticed, were empty – probably a sign that all was well with the two teenagers.

He sat up slowly as Severus passed him the potions to help him recover. As he felt his throat becoming less like grated meat he tested his voice by asking the question, “Severus, is everything well?”

“That depends. Let’s start with the easiest question, how do you feel?” Severus said to him trying to redirect the conversation elsewhere for the moment.

Tom was too smart for that ploy, “Apart from the customary results after the physical exertion, I am personally feeling better than before the ritual. However I know you are trying to avoid something. How are Harry and Hermione?”

“They are physically and mentally well. Harry did not suffer the fate of the last horcrux vessel so Luna’s idea of the soul bond was the correct plan of action.”

Tom looked into Severus’ eyes and he didn’t need Legillimency to know Snape was leaving something unsaid on purpose. However he felt fairly sure what that ‘something’ was.

“Harry was upset. Did he threaten to kill me?”

Severus shook his head, “Not quite, but he was extremely angry.”

Tom sighed, “I should talk to him and ...”

Severus interrupted him, “He is in his room and the only other person he will allow there is with him trying to get him to calm down.”

Tom nodded, “I hope she can succeed.”

The old Severus Snape – hated Hogwarts Potions Professor – reappeared momentarily, “If anyone can snap Potter out of a funk it is Granger. I’ve had to put up with their insufferable friendship for years and ...” He burst out laughing, “I just can’t do that old prick routine anymore. Come September my students won’t recognize me anymore.”

Tom smiled and added, “If all goes well then come September, there will be a number of changes starting at Hogwarts.”

//Scene Break//

Harry looked at his familiar and his anger dissipated quickly. Ever since his eleventh birthday Hedwig had been there with him. She was there through all the times at the Dursleys when he needed someone to talk to. Harry was convinced that she understood what he said. Aside from her habit of reading over his shoulder, he also noticed that she responded to what he told her.

“Hedwig, I don’t know what to feel right now.” She tilted her head slightly and Harry took it as a sign to go on, “I met my Mum last night.”

Hedwig froze, startled. She continued to stare at Harry.

“OK, it wasn’t my Mum. It was a fragment of her soul that stabilized the horcrux in my head. We went through the ritual I told you about last night. It felt so real Hed.” He paused.

Hedwig hooted softly and reached forward with her wing to touch his arm gently. He smiled slightly and continued, “She said she loved me. We talked for what felt like hours and she hugged me. I never knew how much I wanted that until I felt my Mum’s arms around me. She even met Hermione and the two of them hit it off.” His features tightened as he continued, “But Tom was there too. He ruined it. Said he was sorry. SORRY? He killed my parents and he’s sorry? I’m so angry at him – even more than when he was Voldemort. I just met my Mum and he took her away again...” Harry stopped short as his anger got the better of him again.

He was snapped out of his rage by an angry bark. He snapped at his familiar, “I am not being an idiot.”

Hedwig fluttered up with her powerful wings until she in front of his face and slightly higher than his head. Hermione stood open mouthed as the snowy owl quickly beat her wings forward and smacked Harry several times on either side of his head before she landed on his lap.

“Hedwig, I’m not being an idiot! This is so not like the time in third year when I was angry with Hermione about the broom. Hedwig moved to fly up again causing Harry to give in, “OK, OK, maybe it is and I am being an idiot.” Hedwig hooted in agreement and hopped back on the table to face him.

“But Tom is to blame for their death. How can I face him again?”

Hedwig shook her head. Harry scrunched his forehead, “What do you mean no? He killed them.”

Hedwig opened and closed her eyes several times and leaned forward. When she opened her eyes again, Hedwig further convinced Hermione that she was an owl in a class by herself. The rapid eye movement had caused an extra sheen of moisture to develop which caused her eyes to twinkle and she managed to convey that she was looking over a pair of invisible glasses perched on her nose.

Harry took it in stride, "Dumbledore?" He looked like he was about to argue when Hedwig peered at him again with the twinkle. This caused him to pause and he sighed in defeat and frustration, "you're right Hed. I'll need to talk to Tom later but you are right. You always seem to know the right thing to say." His shoulders sagged and he shook his head slowly. His voice was barely above a whisper, "It still hurts though."

Hedwig hooted and flew up onto his shoulder. She cupped his head lovingly in her wing and he leaned his head slightly into her. "Can I tell you about my Mum? She's brilliant."

Hedwig hooted softly. "When I saw her and we recognized each other we hugged. Hedwig it was one of the best hugs I ever had, only Hermione's are in the same class."

At this point Hedwig turned her head toward the girl in question and blinked at her. Hermione took this as a signal to draw closer and open up her connection to him. She sat next to Harry on the opposite side that Hedwig currently occupied. Harry looked surprised at her being there and felt the rush of emotions through the bond as she wrapped him in a hug and said, "Like this?"

He smiled and wrapped his free arm around her. "Exactly. How long have you been here?"

"Hedwig and I arrived about the same time. She somehow knew that she had to talk to you first so she just gave me a look and I knew what she wanted me to do."

Harry chuckled, "Yeah, my Hedwig is like that. She knows me better than I know myself. I stopped thinking of her as an owl about 2 weeks

after Hagrid got her for me. Ever since then she's been a friend and companion."

Hermione teased him, "I know, I'm actually kind of jealous."

Before Harry could reply Hedwig flew off his shoulder and landed on Hermione's. She proceeded to 'hug' Hermione's head in the same way she had done Harry's.

"I think Hed is telling you she loves us both and you don't have to be jealous."

Hedwig hooted in agreement. She then took off and landed back on the table in front of Harry. As she looked at him her eyes slowly closed.

Harry reached out and stroked her head. "Yes Hedwig, I feel better now. You can go get your beauty sleep."

Hedwig barked and nipped indignantly at his finger. "Hey, I didn't mean that you needed the sleep to be beautiful. You're always beautiful."

She hooted back and took flight back out the window to the owlry.

Hermione and Harry fell back on the bed in a tight hug. She kissed him passionately.

When they split apart for air she said, "You know, no one would ever believe us if we told them what just happened here."

"I know." He chuckled, "I've never told anyone this, but there was this one time where Hedwig..."

Hermione smiled and listened attentively to the story. Right now, Harry needed to talk and calm down after a long night.

//Scene Break//

Lucius Malfoy was close to sticking a fork into his right eye. Anything right now would be welcome to ease the pain of having to teach his 'new' son table manners. They had started with lunch yesterday and the lessons continued during dinner and into breakfast this morning. He sighed as he thought to himself, "at least he hasn't sprayed food bits on us like yesterday when he was trying to talk while chewing but – for Merlin's sake – whatever possessed him to think that a serving spoon and mixing bowl are appropriate to use for cereal in the morning.

He looked over at the boy again and felt revulsion as he saw the large spoon easily entering Ron's mouth. Lucius was at the point where he was deciding on whether to use the Imperius curse to force Ronald (it was definitely not the pedestrian Ron anymore) to learn how to eat properly or the Cruciatus curse to punish him when he did things wrong. He was leaning towards both.

Ron saw his new dad smiling. "I must be doing something right after those lessons yesterday," he thought, "Let's see, don't talk with food in your mouth. Check. Keep your elbows at your side. Check. Don't slurp your food and do place it completely in your mouth. Check." He thought this as his mouth completely engulfed the spoon. Once he was nearly done he picked up the bowl and noisily gulped the rest of the milk down. Putting down the bowl he let out a large loud belch and smiled – after all he had heard that was a compliment in some cultures. Hermione even said so.

//Flashback//

Lunch was just finished and the third year Gryffindors were just packing up to head to their afternoon Potions class. Ron let a huge belch out that caused even the Slytherins to cringe across the hall. "WOW!" Ron exclaimed, "That was one of my best yet!"

Hermione had been raised in a proper English household and cringed. "He didn't even excuse himself!" she thought.

"Ronald!" she exclaimed, "You know there are some cultures in the world where that action would be considered a compliment. However, the English culture is not one of them."

“Wow Hermione,” Ron said after wiping his mouth and nose on the sleeve of his robes, “I wonder which cultures they are and how I picked it up. Maybe the Egyptian or Romanian cultures are like that and I picked it up from Bill or Charlie. I’ll have to write them and find out. Can you believe that some people have had the nerve to call it rude and said that I at least should have excused myself? Thanks Hermione!”

What Ron didn’t see as he left the hall was Hermione repeatedly banging her head against the table until Harry stopped her and got her to go to Potions.”

//End Flashback//

Lucius was nearly apoplectic at the sounds and resulting smell from the belch. He quickly revised his teaching methods. “Avada Kaderva is the only one that will work and make him presentable,” he thought with a wry look on his face. The only thing that caused him to smile was, “as soon as there’s a magical heir though ...”

He mentally ran down the list of prospective mates. Pickings were slim indeed. Since he was wizard non grata in many English wizarding circles he realized he may need to go outside to the Far East or Eastern Europe to find a willing bride for his new son.

//Scene Break//

It was late morning by the time Charlie arrived at the Burrow. As he approached the door it opened and his sister came running out with a big grin on her face and her arms wide open yelling “CHAAAARRRRRLIEEEEEEE.” He scooped his sister up and swung her around.

“Ginny, it’s great to see you. Look at you! You’re growing into a beautiful young woman!” He turned serious, “Now you let me know if any boys try to make you do anything you don’t want to. We always need appetizers for the dragons.” His face broke into a grin.

Ginny giggled and hugged her brother again. "Come on in. Mum's been anxiously waiting for you.

Molly watched from the window. She had been plotting with her daughter just how to greet Charlie and get him on their side of this whole thing. Albus had suggested using Charlie as a spy to find out what Arthur and the rest of the boys were up to but they would refrain for the while on trusting him enough to make him part of the Master Plan. She smiled as she rubbed a bit of onion juice under her eyes – Ginny had completed act one, now it was Molly's turn.

When Charlie stepped in a sight greeted him – his mother was standing there with tears running down her face and bloodshot eyes. She quickly came forward and hugged him. He could feel her silent sobs.

"Mum, what's wrong? I got your note and came as fast as I could. There was a delay getting through customs since I work with dragons every day." When he got no answer he looked over his mother's shoulder at Ginny, 'Hey sis, where is everyone?"

This caused tears to run down Ginny's face and Molly started shaking even more. It took about 10 minutes before Molly was able to talk to Charlie.

"I ... I ... I'm sorry Charlie, it's just so good to hug one of my sons."

He chuckled, "Well, there are enough of us ..." this caused the two women to start wailing again. It was another 10 minutes before they calmed down.

Molly detached herself from her son and blew her nose. "Charlie, let's go sit down in the kitchen. Once they were seated she took a deep breath and continued, "Someone is feeding your father potions that have caused him to abandon parts of his family." Inside she was smirking – in the literal sense this was true. St. Mungo's most likely had Arthur on a potions regimen to clear the potions her and Albus had given him out of his system.

Charlie looked shocked as she continued, "He divorced me and disowned Ginny and Ron. Except for the Burrow, which he let me keep, I'm practically destitute. I could not stand the thought of my daughter being at the mercies of strangers with now name to defend herself so I was able to adopt her. However I didn't have the means and now poor Ronald is Merlin knows where with no name. The rest of your brothers sided with your father. I have no idea if they have been subjected to potions or not." Throughout the explanation she had seen how his famous Weasley temper had been rising and his ears and face turned red.

"That's insane! Do you have any suspicion's who is poisoning them?"

"All I know is that it happened after Sirius Black's will reading and Harry Potter was the main beneficiary. He was cordial to your father and the Twins, but he was nasty to me Ginny and especially Ron. The timing seems to be to close for it to be a coincidence?"

Charlie turned to Ginny, "Things not going well with Harry? I thought you two were seeing each other." Molly had written to Charlie that Ginny and Harry were dating and the wedding was going to be on her fifteenth birthday.

Ginny just looked down, "It was going well until Hermione Granger got in the way."

Charlie gasped, "What? The mudblood? What does she have over a pureblood like you?"

Ginny and Molly secretly cheered inside as Ginny continued in an angry pout, "I think she's using Harry to get back at Ron and keep him from me." She paused and then said, "You don't think Hermione is behind all the potions do you?"

Molly thought for a moment, "I do recall she was asking me last summer about love potions and mind control potions."

Charlie was seething inside. "Mum, Ginny, I swear to you I will get to the bottom of this. I'm going to go over to Bill's place and get some answers."

Molly demonstrated the fine art of faking sincerity to her daughter with her next statement. "Charlie, this requires stealth and subtlety. If it is Hermione then she is quite brilliant and you have to be careful. Try and approach bill and see if you can find out what they do and how it may be connected with Harry. It's the only hope we have of getting this family back together."

Charlie thought is over and he reluctantly agreed. Molly offered him a late breakfast and when he was done he steeled himself and apparated away to visit his big brother.

//Scene Break//

It was an apprehensive group that gathered for a late breakfast/brunch that morning at Potter Manor. Tom and Severus arrived – the latter having managed a 2 hour kip – and Grangers along with everyone else who had held vigil during the night. All eyes looked to Tom, who appeared more human and less Voldemort following the previous night's activities. His eyes were losing their red colour and going back to the natural blue he had inherited from his father.

The Grangers had already filled the rest in on what had transpired. Tonks had hugged her wolf tightly as tears ran down his face upon hearing that Lily's soul had been used to anchor the horcrux and that Harry had been able to meet his exceptional mother – albeit all too briefly. Harry's initial reaction upon waking left everyone subdued and each person around the table kept glancing to the entryway to see if the young couple would join them.

The meal was a silent affair until they heard a throat clearing. Standing in the doorway was Hermione tightly holding a very exhausted-looking boyfriend. All heads turned to the couple and Hermione saw the subdued faces around the table.

She spoke up with a concerned voice, "Did anything happen?"

Tonks rolled her eyes, "You mean apart from what Tom and Severus have filled us in on?"

At this point Luna got up and gave Harry a friendly hug. She smiled as she said, "I don't feel the wrackspurt infestation anymore."

This broke the ice and there were a few smiles and chuckles. Harry even smiled and said, "Nope, for the first time I can remember they're gone." He turned to Tom, "I'm sure Severus told you how I felt when I woke up. To be honest with you, I was ready to kill you right there. That's why I had to leave immediately."

Tom nodded, "No one would have blamed you."

Harry continued, "No, not right then, but our new group of friends would have come to blame me when the purebloods destroyed our society. It took a certain girl," at this point he smiled at his girlfriend and she chuckled at the shared joke between them as he continued, "to beat it into my head that I have Dumbledore to blame for this just as much as he is to blame for the creation of Voldemort. I was reminded that I am friends with Tom Riddle and no longer have to worry about Voldemort."

He approached Tom and offered his hand, "Tom, I have seen some of the things you were subjected to and were compelled to do to yourself. Hermione made me see that even though last night was painful, it was a gift. I go to spend time with my Mum and I will treasure the experience for the rest of my life regardless of the circumstances. It was a healing experience for me in more ways than just getting rid of your soul fragment. I'm hoping we can still be friends and if not then willing allies."

Tom shook his hand and said, "Harry, ever since you opened my eyes to what is going on we have been willing allies. I feel that over time it will be a lasting friendship," and with that took his hand and shook it.

That broke the tension in the room and gave the morale of those assembled a boost that was sorely needed. Harry even volunteered to share the memory of meeting Lily with everyone since they might be able to glean more information. It would be done during the next gathering of the OE.

Hermione looked at Tom and asked him how he was feeling.

Tom responded, "I am feeling much better than I have in years. Now that Harry is safe and no longer has a connection with me I will accelerate the process of reintegrating the rest of the horcruxes." He became pensive, "I only wish..."

Narcissa looked at him. He looked concerned, "what is it you wish?"

"I wish your former husband had not been so careless with the diary. I'm not sure how whole I will become without the first fragment I severed from my soul."

That caused a pause through the assembled group. Would they be able to get the entire Tom Riddle back? What if they could not?

//Scene Break//

Deep inside one of the oldest castles in Great Britain still in everyday use, in a hidden room covered in runes, four chests lay undisturbed as they had for the better part of 1000 years. Each carried the crest and seal of one of the four founding houses of the school that was to this day still in operation in the castle.

One of the founders had been a powerful seer – the identity of the seer had been lost to the ravages of time, the frailty of human memory and the historical revisionism of a particular family. Nonetheless, while this seer never gave an actual prophecy, his/her glimpses into the near future had proven so accurate that when the glimpses of the far future started appearing they were taken seriously.

The four founders – all great friends whose bonds were forged in the heat of battle – decided that they would each leave something for their future heirs to assist them in a struggle that they knew nothing about save that their heirs would need to work together.

They each designed a set of wards that would only respond favourably to their particular descendant. This would force all four to come together willingly in order to claim their inheritance.

Rowena had the idea to enchant the castle as a guardian (although Salazar also added his own more idiosyncratic guardian). The role of the guardian would be to care for the heirs whenever possible and to improve upon itself over time. While the original guardian was more of an automaton it had developed a rudimentary sentience over the course of a millennium. As soon as a founder entered the school it could sense them but over the years the additional wards placed upon the castle by various Headmasters restricted the castle in what it could do. The current Headmaster was one of the worst. He specifically cast wards to dampen the affect of the Guardian – even though he did not know what it's purpose was, he bound it once he found out it would not answer to the Headmaster blindly. The Guardian was unable to resist as this Headmaster started drawing power from the castle to extend his lifespan.

That changed when a pair of the heirs showed up and then a third the next year. Its purpose to protect and assist the heirs began to override the additional wards and the castle started to slowly restrict the power drain of the Headmaster. All that was required for the guardian to server her purpose (she had taken on a female persona since many of the witches and wizards passing living there over the centuries referred to the castle as a 'she') was the inclusion of the fourth heir. He had been there a few decades before however the other heirs never were present at the same time.

The guardian even watched helplessly as the Slytherin heir damaged his soul. To pass into the chamber all of the heirs had to be there willingly and be complete and whole in mind, body and soul. The Guardian had also noticed the current Gryffindor heir had extra soul fragments that had to be cleansed in order to accept his inheritance.

While she was strengthening, the Guardian was still bound and would be until the heirs restored the ancient and proper wards. Her ability to help the heirs was limited but three short years ago she was able to save the Slytherin line.

//Flashback//

Harry was dying and in a last-ditch effort he stabbed the basilisk fang into the diary. He collapsed as he saw the almost-corporeal Tom Riddle disappear and a blackness rise out of the diary.

While Fawkes was attending to Harry, the young exhausted and dying lad did not notice that the blackness did not disperse right away. The Guardian had recognized the soul fragment of her heir from all of those years ago and – using its vast repository of knowledge – modified the stone in the floor beneath the diary to become a horcrux vessel and absorb the soul fragment.

When Harry managed to look back at the diary there was no trace of Tom Riddle and he assumed that whatever was possessing the diary had been destroyed.

//End Flashback//

The guardian had watched over the soul fragment of the Slytherin heir for the time when he would come back and reclaim it. Another boost in the Guardian's strength last night signified that the heirs were coming together and getting stronger. It was only a matter of time.

A/N - In case anyone hasn't quite clued in by now, I hate Ron Weasley (or Ronald Malfoy in this story). Nothing good will come of him in any stories I write. The hardest part right now is figuring out who to mate him to.

I am writing chapters as I get the time and the muse. Both my stories really interest me and I even have another storyline forming in my brain in an uncontrolled manner. I keep having to beat it down so that I can concentrate on the two I'm still writing.

Some people ask about other characters like Hagrid, Dobby, Winky and the rest of the Teaching staff. Their appearances in the story will come in time (if at all) when it makes sense to me to have them in the storyline.

I hope you liked the resolution to the Harry hates Tom dilemma I left in the last chapter. I didn't want to write several chapters of mistrust and angst just to have them realize that they are stronger united than apart. That's where Dr. Hedwig came to

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